

















# GUATEMALA PROFILE



# Guatemala Profile

*Written and Illustrated by*  
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SAN SEBASTIAN  
REO.

NEW YORK · COWARD-McCANN, INC · 1939

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To  
DRS. MARIANO LOPEZ H. AND LIZARDO ESTRADA B.,  
WHOSE KNIVES CUT THE PAGES OF THIS BOOK,  
BUT MOST OF ALL TO MY BELOVED WIFE,  
ELSIE





## Foreword

Guatemala—land of enchantment and land of colors.

Guatemala—cradle of the Maya civilization which created the most outstanding culture of ancient America.

Many men have written about you, first Alvarado who conquered the country in a cruel way; then Bernal Diaz, the stout old soldier who was followed by Father Ximenez and Thomas Gage, the Priest; Alfred Maudslay, the archaeologist, and Blair Niles, the novelist, all loved you and wrote beautifully about you.

Now for the first time, comes an artist, a painter who expresses his love for the country through his colors and his colorful writing.

Addison Burbank in his book tells why he became fascinated with Guatemala, and in words that are as brilliant as his paintings he tells about his experience while he wandered through the towns and villages and succumbed to the exquisite beauty and charm of the country.

I am no judge of his artistic experience, but where he speaks of the history and ethnology of Guatemala, he shows that he has consulted those who have previously written about Guatemala.

Every person who goes to that beautiful country should be grateful to Burbank for his book.

FRANS BLOM

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A colorful corner  
in the Cantel market

# I Tropical Port

**T**WO THINGS had brought me to Guatemala: a predilection for the bright world of the tropics and a desire to see and to paint the richly colorful life of the present-day Maya Indians.

It was an exciting self-assignment, and in preparation I had crammed a little Spanish and read what books I could find on the country.

I had first heard of Guatemala from friends who had spent three weeks there and who had returned in a dither of enthusiasm over what they had seen. They muttered strange names like Quiriguá, Antigua, Lake Atitlán, Chichicastenango, Rio Dulce, and they had a gaily painted little wooden chest filled with bright weavings which they called *guípiles*, *cortes*, *cintas*, *rebosos*, etc., and which they said the Indians made on primitive two-stick looms for their own daily wear. The little chest also contained examples of hand-painted pottery, necklaces of pieces-of-eight, grotesque ceremonial dance masks, and exquisitely carved gourd drinking vessels. I had never seen such interesting spoils of travel.

At that time I could not have placed Guatemala on the map. I had a vague idea that it was a state in South America or perhaps an island in the South Seas. So, to illuminate my abysmal ignorance I looked for books and magazine articles and in so doing discovered for myself a chapter of American history that seems never to have been included in the textbooks.



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I learned that Guatemala was the first and chief of five Central American republics occupying the isthmus between Mexico and South America, and that its principal exports were coffee, chicle, hardwoods, and bananas. Its capital was a modern city of 140,000 people situated on a plateau 5,000 feet above sea level, where the climate was ever cool in spite of being in the deep tropics. But what interested me most was that of the 2,400,000 inhabitants of the country nearly 85 per cent were true Indians, whose blood and folk ways had been scarcely at all contaminated by contact with modern civilization. The more I learned of these Indians, their strange customs and decorative costumes, their curious worship of saints and idols, the more my desire to go among them rose to a pitch of febrile intensity. I hoped to find in their life the beauty and picturesqueness which civilization demands as the price of its benefits.

Soon after Columbus proved by his fourth voyage that there was land west of the West Indies, other daring adventurers were exploring the mainland and discovering the riches that could be had by mere plundering. In an incredibly short time three supermen—Cortez, Pizarro, and Alvarado—had destroyed the amazing civilizations of the Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas and begun to graft onto the ancient trunk an equally amazing civilization imported from southern Europe.

To avoid territorial disputes the Pope drew his famous vertical line through the then little-known half of the globe, giving Brazil to Portugal and the rest of the Western hemisphere to Spain. Truly a magnanimous gift, and one Spain guarded jealously for nearly three centuries.

Pedro de Alvarado, a dashing, cruel, blond Spanish captain, who had shared the glory of Mexico's conquest with Cortez, was assigned the task of conquering the Mayan city-states to the south in the country called Guatemala. Accordingly he set forth in 1524 with 300 foot soldiers, about as many Mexican allies, and 135 horsemen, and accomplished his purpose in surprisingly short order by pitting the rival states against each other, and by the fear inspired in the natives by the strange zoological specimens which charged them bearing invincible godlike riders. A widespread fear gripped the people, who believed it was useless to contend with these gods, while an ancient

prophecy to the effect that from the East would come bearded white men to rule them convinced many that the day of fulfillment had come. These received the Spaniards with friendship and gifts, worshipfully calling Alvarado Tonatio, or the Sun. It was only afterward that they saw their mistake, and then it was too late.

As the first captain-general, or *adelantado*, of the new Spanish province, Alvarado founded the first two capitals, both ill-fated. A third, however, succeeded, and grew in the course of over two centuries into the most splendid city between Mexico and Peru. This is the Antigua of today, a half-ruined colonial city which still looks much as it did when it was destroyed in 1773, after being rocked by a particularly violent earthquake. The fourth capital was built on the site of the present Guatemala City, thirty miles from Antigua.

Guatemala declared its independence of Spain in 1821, about which time archeologists first discovered in the almost uninhabited lower jungles the pyramidal remains of very ancient Mayan cities: Quiriguá, Copán, Palenke, and Uxmal.

Yes, I had read all these things; but as I stood in the prow of the little white banana freighter S.S. *Plátano* as she entered the turquoise bay of Amatique, having come 3,000 miles from New York, I half expected to see the water dotted by dugout canoes putting out from a white-lipped curving beach with leaning coco palms concealing thatched houses, and to have the boat boarded by slender copper-skinned maidens with perfumed hair and a hibiscus between their teeth and clothed in a sort of clinging sarong, who had swum out to meet us. But as the boat warped up to the long disorderly United Fruit Company pier at Puerto Barrios, I saw only black stevedores and brown clerks in soiled white clothes, while the town was a cluster of tin-roofed yellow houses and tottering shanties. Beyond, however, rose unexpectedly high jungled mountains cut by romantic glades. While I gazed upon the squalid harbor and wild mountains, I little dreamed that I would stay in Guatemala thirteen months and lose not only my heart but almost my life.

Mr. G. B. Austin, the United Fruit Company port superintendent, came aboard and helped me through the formalities with the white-ducked, dark-skinned customs officials. He is a

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short, middle-aged man, dapper, healthy, and energetic—the exact opposite of what you would expect from anyone who has spent nearly a score of years in the enervating coastal tropics.

A sharp echoing toot was heard from shore.

"There goes the train," Mr. Austin said.

"When is the next?"

"Tomorrow, same time."

"Good! I'll have a whole day to sketch in Barrios."

Mr. Austin smiled. "You're the first person who was ever glad to be left in Barrios," he said.

My ten fellow passengers, of whom only two besides myself were leaving the ship, had already gone ashore. But I remained on board all morning to sketch views from the water. A multitude of gulls and spike-tailed man-o'-war birds skimmed through the rigging of the idle boat, and the terrific heat made the scrubbed deck dance.

At noon the passengers returned. One, a pleasant Armenian merchant bound for Honduras, brought me some luscious mangoes to try. Others showed me charming native textiles which they had purchased in the shops.

After lunch Mr. Austin came and asked me if I would like to use the company's small launch for the rest of the day. Accepting without questioning how I rated this courtesy, I invited five cruise companions to take a trip around the bay.

It was still light when we returned to Barrios, and I went into the town, which so far I had seen only from the water.

Puerto Barrios is a banana boom town, sprawling over a pestiferous morass between the sea and the howling jungle, and peopled by the castoffs of five races, black, brown, red, yellow, and white—petty merchants, beachcombers, and roustabouts. All the houses stand on stilts and have *lamina*, or corrugated tin roofs. While a few are trim and have coats of yellow paint, such as the United Fruit Company buildings and the Hotel Internacional, the rest are frowsy native shops, cantinas, shanties. There is not a church in sight. The waterfront and the wandering paths are lined with leaning coco palms. Filthy black vultures, called *sopilotes*,\* scavenge the streets and yards. Waves

\* Sometimes spelled zopilotes, but as z is pronounced like s, the trend is away from its use.

sweep under the dizzily tilted waterfront shanties with their sea-going privies stretching out picturesquely from the palm-lined shore on spider-leg piers.

By the water in front of the Hotel Internacional is a small park with a bandstand where a loud discordant band was playing and the dark-skinned people were sauntering, carefree and indolent. At sunset the band was interrupted by the firing of a twenty-one gun salute. I almost could have believed it was another of Mr. Austin's courtesies.

"The shooting? Ah, that is the *diana*," the clerk at the Internacional, where I went to register for the night, explained in Spanish. "It is that the senate closes today."

As I walked back to the S.S. *Plátano* for the last dinner with my ship companions, night crowded precipitately upon the brief tropical twilight. The flickering glow of fireflies pricked the darkness and mosquitoes pricked my skin. The heat still hung stickily in the heavy air.

After dinner I leaned with a woman companion over the railing of the "B" deck, watching the sketchily garbed Caribs and Jamaica negroes loading the hold with bananas. The pier and the forward and after decks were lit by glaring electric floodlights. In the stark blue-white blaze of light the dark-bodied men, each carrying a luminous green stem of bananas, moved in a steady stream from the freight cars to the conveyor belts, accompanied by lurid purple shadows. Each stem passed the inspection of a man who trimmed it, if necessary, with a stroke of his machete. Although the swordlike blade flashed at times within a fraction of an inch of the stevedores' heads and arms, the men never flinched.

The hold is refrigerated and ventilated so as to forward the ripening process, bananas requiring a certain temperature and room to breathe. Some sixty thousand stems were to be loaded, which would take all night and perhaps most of the next day. As the fruit must come up to a certain standard and be at the right stage to be ready upon reaching the market, hundreds of stems were rejected.

A sense of drama pervaded the scene: the eerie brilliance of the floodlights, the endless chain of bright green bananas, the

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maneuvers of the sweating, nearly naked stevedores, the flashing of the sharp machetes and raucous overtone of the machinery—all created a strange excitation. You felt that something might happen. And something did. Suddenly a big negro emitted a yell and began tearing off his shirt. Simultaneously, five tiny daggers stabbed my right arm. Looking down, I saw that the young woman beside me had dug her scarlet nails into my flesh. She had gone deathly pale. So we left for the bar side of the ship and ordered drinks. I never knew exactly what happened to the big negro, but some time later I was reminded of the incident by a news item I ran across in a Guatemalan daily. It told of a stevedore who had been bitten by a venomous snake.

When I got up at dawn the next morning, a light rain was falling, reminding me that it was the beginning of the six months' wet season. I found the big eating room of the hotel sparsely filled with men in shirt sleeves. The barefoot waiter brought me my first Guatemalan breakfast, which consisted of a glass of orange juice, *buevos pasado por agua* (eggs supposedly soft-boiled by being passed through tepid water), and essence coffee, served in a vinegar vial and to be mixed to taste with hot water and milk.

After breakfast I found that Mr. Austin's thoughtfulness was still following me, for he had sent his own negroes for my luggage so that I would not be victimized by the pirate-whelped local porters. He was at the station to see me off and told me that he had telephoned Eddie Clark, the company agent at Quiriguá, where I was going to stop over, advising him to look out for me. I thanked him for his many kindnesses and boarded the train, which left, surprisingly, on schedule.

There was a parlor car with an observation platform which I could have occupied in solitary splendor if I had not chosen to go first class. I had few fellow passengers, but looking ahead into the second-class coach, I saw that the hard benches were full and that several gypsy-like women were squatting in the aisle with their bundles, live chickens, and baskets of fish.

As the little narrow gauge train bored its way through a tunnel of greenery, a soldier in a faded blue uniform came and took my name, destination, and business in the country.



PUERTO RINCÓN

All night the men loaded  
bananas into the ship's hold

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On either side of the tracks the jungle was so dense that, as Fred Allen would say, a snake would have to coil mentally. Trees with knotted trunks swaddled in parasitical plants were half-buried in the matted undergrowth, splashed with exotic scarlet flowers. Now and then a giant *ceiba*—the sacred tree of the Indians, who believe that man is descended from it—thrust its pale sculptured column above all the rest. A man could become hopelessly bushed by stepping a few feet beyond the clear into that tangled wilderness.

Thatched ranchos, like notes from Gaugin, appeared in little clearings, and the train's pace was so leisurely that I found time to make hasty pencil sketches of them. Usually there was a slovenly woman dressed in a pink Mother Hubbard standing in the doorway with two or three naked children with worm-distended bellies. And, if there were yard enough, there would be some chickens, dogs, and perhaps a mule—all apparently on the verge of starvation. Poverty amidst splendor.

I saw on the porch of a rancho a negro skinning a jaguar the size of a calf.

Before long we came to the Rio Motagua, a broad muddy stream that rises two hundred miles away in the heart of the Cordilleras. Dugout *cayugas* battled its umber currents, their gunwales almost awash from heaping cargoes of bananas. From time to time along its banks little villages materialized. Whenever we halted, a few barefoot soldiers on the porch of the *comandancia* would snap to attention. Dusky women with baskets of fruit or cooked food balanced on their heads would flock beneath the car windows and do a thriving business with the natives, whose appetites seemed unappeasable.

When we reached the station of Bananera, the conductor, whom I had told I wanted to get off at the United Fruit Company headquarters, came to me with the assurance that this was it and that I had made a mistake in buying a ticket to Quiriguá. I had considerable misgivings, but there was no time for an argument in a foreign language, and besides, his manner was so obliging that I could not have resisted even if he had wanted to put me down in the midst of the Sahara. So I got off the train at Bananera, in a pelting rain and thirty miles short of my destination!

But he was right about one thing. Bananera is headquarters with houses for employees surrounded by tropical gardens, tennis courts, a golf course, an outdoor swimming pool, and a clubhouse, where every Saturday night there is a marimba orchestra, dancing, and movies.

I was not at all sorry for my mistake. As the rain was intermittent, I was able to make several sketches. And in the afternoon I caught a local for Quiriguá.





## II

### Bananas and Mayan Ruins

**Q**UIRIGUÁ IS A station, hospital, banana farm, commissary, native market, and Mayan ruin—almost everything, in short, but a town. Natives swarmed about the station, but there were few houses in sight. As I stepped off the train, a grinning lad, whose wavy red hair and fair freckled face clearly never came from his Indian mother, approached me.

"Señor Boorbank?"

At my nod, he took my bags, aided by another boy of more certain lineage. Near by, a vision of coolness, stood Mrs. Clark.

"Hope you won't mind a little walk. We've no taxi service in Quiriguá," she said, smiling.

It was good to walk in the rain-freshened air. We took a path by the side of the tracks, for roads are unknown in the banana belt. Every sort of vehicle, from automobile to bicycle, uses the narrow gauge tracks which crisscross the region. Men and mules tread the ties.

My feet were to become only too familiar with those ties during the following week. But when I learned that they were made of rosewood and mahogany, I walked with a lighter step. After all, they were ties of distinction. Only a country rich in hardwood forests could afford such an aristocratic road bed. But then, Guatemala means "land of trees."

On one side of the tracks we saw the squalid native market and on the other the well-tended, tree-shaded lawns which slope up to the United Fruit Company's fine hospital. A little beyond was the Clarks' house, where we were met by Mrs. Clark's mother, who was waiting tea on the veranda. Later Eddie Clark strode in. He is the *administrador* of Quiriguá farm, a tall jaunty young Scot who dresses the part of the picturesque *finquero*, from sun helmet to high dashboard puttees and clanking Spanish spurs.

Next morning when he saw the outfit I had bought in New York with no one to guide me, he gave a low whistle.

"I get it," I said, following his gaze to my waterproof moccasin boots and gaudy red-topped wool socks. "What could I do? The sporting goods stores were outfitting Maine campers."

He examined the rucksack I brought for my painting equipment—the added Alpine touch.

"You're certainly going to give the natives a treat," he grinned.

He was right. In Guatemala only *cargadores* and traveling merchants burden their backs. So it was natural that one of the jests at my expense should be "What has *el gringo* to sell?"

Don Eddie told me that I could get a *mozo* to carry my pack for five cents a day, but I replied that I believed the only way to learn a country was to wander about alone. And I cast appearances to the winds by donning a flashy colored-straw sombrero. After all, in a land where a temperature of ninety-four degrees in the shade is considered a relief from the heat, comfort comes first.

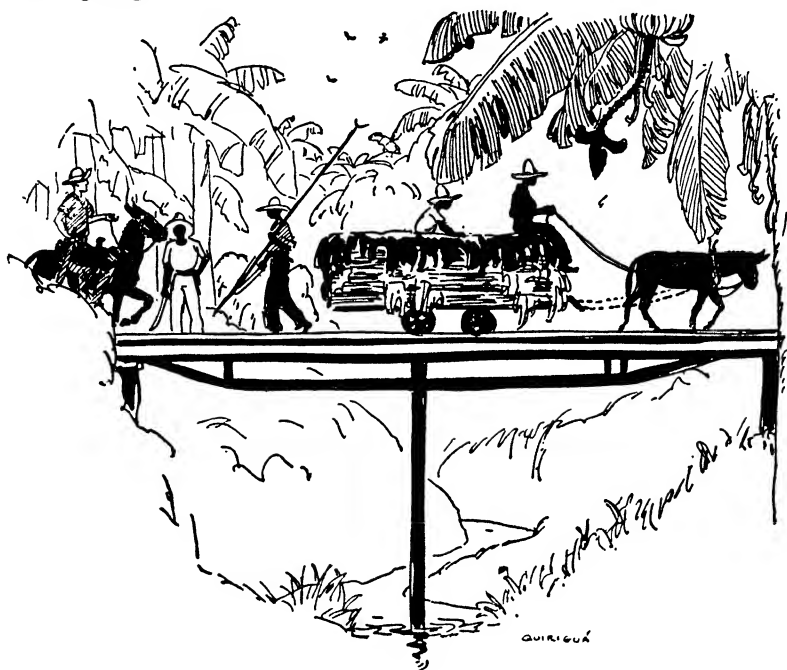
At Puerto Barrios I had seen bananas stowed in the aired and refrigerated hold of the *Plátano* and noted the care with which the stems were selected in order to reach the market precisely when ready. That was the dramatic finale. First came the call for so many thousand stems. Every *administrador* in the district had his quota to fill.

Don Eddie offered to show me a banana cutting, so one morning he had an extra mule saddled for me and took me with him.

Presently we turned down a green aisle overarched by tattered banana fronds and were guided in the direction where work was in progress by little flags of stripped banana leaves

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placed at intervals along the narrow track. The thick foliage shut out the breeze and kept in the humid exhalation from the moist earth which held in suspension the enervating perfume of rotting vegetation.



I was surprised to learn that there are over two hundred varieties of bananas, only one of which, known as the *Gros Michel* (Fat Michael), is raised commercially.

The banana, strictly speaking, isn't a tree at all, but a succession of tightly wrapped green leaves which unfurl in long satiny banners of such fragile texture that they are tattered into a fringe by the lightest zephyr. The trunk is so spongy that you can puncture it with your thumb or cut through its thickest part with a single stroke of a machete, and you wonder how it is able to support its wealth of heavy foliage. Each plant puts forth a large cone-shaped red flower whose color contrasts strikingly with the delightful glossy green of the great waving leaves. The bananas develop along the flower stem in rows of up-pointing green "fingers" until there are from six to ten "hands." The standard "count" is nine.

After nearly an hour's riding we reached the scene of the banana cutting. Each cutter has two backers. Don Eddie asked one team to go through its act in slow motion to permit me to make notes. After selecting a tree with a stem of the proper fullness, the cutter, who wore a brimless hat the better to look up, jabbed the trunk with a crescent-shaped knife on the end of a long pole in such a way that the bunch of fruit fell forward within easy cutting reach. One of the backers then whacked off the stem with his machete. The other received it upon his shoulder pad and stacked it on the ground with other stems. As the tree would not fructify again, the man with the machete felled it. And there it would lie until it rotted back into the soil. New shoots would take its place. For there are always three generations in a banana family; by the time the mother tree is with fruit the daughter has presented it with a granddaughter. The trees "walk" off in all directions, so that in a few years the original order of planting is lost.

Machetes, by the way, are those murderous-looking blades every *mozo* carries. While a symbol of the tropics, the best ones come from Hartford, Connecticut.

Bananas are prolific past belief. It would almost seem that once a banana farm was started, nature gratuitously earned the dividends. But disease may crop up any time, or a high wind may flatten hundreds of acres of trees.

At every step, bananas are handled as carefully as new-born babies. While the cutter and his men passed on to the next tree and the next, a man with a mule appeared. This man picked up the stems left by the cutters and placed two in either side of a "trash mat" of banana fiber covering the mule's back. He then heaved a fifth stem upon his own padded shoulder and started back in the direction whence he had come. Following him, we arrived shortly at a receiving station, where bananas were being loaded upon a mule-drawn flatcar, padded with a mixture of banana leaves and fiber called "mush." The bananas would be carted to a freight siding, where they would be checked for quality before being sent down to Puerto Barrios.

The railroad is Quiriguá's Main Street, and it is one of the most curious thoroughfares in the world. I was always seeing

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little trains apparently going nowhere and taking their time about it. Fifty-seven varieties of motor vehicles use the rails besides. There are rail-gearied Packards, which make the run to the capital in a quarter of the time taken by the daily express. Then there are the common rail-jumpers called "push cars," from the way they are started. There is even a traveling bank, an armored car that makes the rounds of the district. Stranger still, is the four-wheeled rail-bicycle. Once I saw a pompous-looking negro sailing down the tracks on one of these, holding a big umbrella to shade him from the sun—a living sketch for the pencil of Garrett Price, of the New Yorker.

But most of the people who pass along the tracks go on horses or mules or plain shank's mare.

A few times I accepted a lift from a push car, but wanting to observe the life more familiarly, I usually walked wherever I wanted to go.

Around Quiriguá there are fewer negroes than at Barrios, more Indians and ladinos, or persons of mixed blood—small brown men with high-crowned heads, flat faces, and splayed feet, shod with sandals cut from old tire casings. The women always go barefoot, however, which accounts for the prevalence of hookworm among them and the abdominal swelling which creates the impression of universal pregnancy.

These dark-visaged, machete-carrying men look a good deal like bandits, but they always saluted me with a friendly "*Buenos dias, señor,*" and if they were going my way, would generally fall into step with me.

In this way I was escorted to the Mayan ruins one morning by an Indian *mozo*. I gave him a cigarette to break the ice, and plunged with my learn-to-speak-like-a-native-in-three-months Spanish. I began by saying "*Soy Americano.*" This did not go over at all, and I realized that it was because he was American too. So I hastened to explain that I came from another America which lay to the north many days over the water.

"*Ab sí, señor,*" he exclaimed after puzzling a moment. "It is where the clothes come from."

Wherever or whatever the U. S. A. might be, it was symbolized for him by the soiled white shirt and trousers he wore. He little realized that those same clothes were a symbol also of

his racial degradation; for when he discarded his own traditional dress for them, he lost his Indian character and became José the *mozo*.

His mind was delightfully vague on all points concerning the outside world. To him all whites were gringos and came from a general insane asylum beyond the hills and waters.

When I asked him where he and the other workers lived, he pointed toward the jungled foothills of the Monkey Mountains which separate Quiriguá from Lake Izabál. This explained the houselessness of Quiriguá.

Groups of natives passed us on their way to market, the women carrying head baskets, bundles, and babies, the men coolly unencumbered except for their indispensable machetes. One poor woman carried a big basket on her head, a heavy bundle on one arm, a baby on the other, and a second child that was still an unblest event.

All were obviously innocent of the use of soap and warm water. Not that there was a shortage of bathtubs. The pastures were full of them, porcelain-lined and in good condition, that had been abandoned by the Fruit Co. when they moved their headquarters. They made excellent mule troughs. I asked my Indian friend why the people themselves did not use them.

"But, for what are they good, *señor*?" he shrugged.

He had me there.

Perhaps we North Americans overdo the suppression of good honest body odors, are too nose-conscious. Cleanliness, after all, is not a synonym for godliness; it is an outward gesture toward that state, if you will, or a form of social window-dressing. But primitive people, especially in Spanish countries, seem to know that it is more important to purify their souls than their bodies. Religion is their food and drink. And I had not gone far with my companion before he began questioning me about my beliefs. Was I Catholic? No? How then could I call myself a Christian? Convinced that my soul was in limbo, he talked to me with passionate earnestness about the saints, the blessed Trinity, and the Holy Virgin, pointing the while an exhortatory finger toward the empyrean. But *lo importante*, he declared, was to believe in *el único Cristo*. And when he found that we were at one on that point, he grasped and wrung my hand with great joy.

And so, having reached the path to the ruins, we parted. I went my way and he went his, and I am sure his heart was as light as that of a boy scout who has done his good deed for the day.

Just opposite the entrance to the ruins is a sun-swept clearing occupied by a string of old boxcars set on piles where many negro families live in promiscuous misery. From here I entered a leafy tunnel of lofty forest trees whose fluted trunks were corded with the thick stems of mammoth-leaved vines. From every limb hung looping lianas; in every cleft aerial parasites had rooted and flung forth flaming torches. Chameleons and little green lizards darted out of my way. I crossed a wooden footbridge over a prattling rivulet and a few paces beyond came out upon a great open space, once the temple plaza of the Mayas.

Here are the great carved stone monoliths standing darkly against the sunlit emerald green of the jungle, and at the far end of the clearing are the weed-grown ruins of the huge pyramid upon which the temple stood.

As I moved from stela to stela, I was astonished by the perfection of the carvings, so florid in design, so chaste in motive, and so utterly unintelligible save for the date glyphs. From these we know that it is fifteen hundred years since the last stela was carved and put in place and the last human victim sacrificed upon the altar stone.

While human sacrifice is the most monstrous feature of ancient Mayan religion, J. Eric Thompson points out that it took the place of slaughter in war. Mayan warriors were trained to take captives and not to kill, which is one reason the Spanish losses were so light.

The almost complete absence of the female form in Mayan art, even to symbolize the deity of fertility, surprised Aldous Huxley. Perhaps one explanation is that the old Mayan empire was as much a man's world as present-day Indian Guatemala. Among the aborigines sex is on an animalistic plane. Desire under the volcanoes is expressed without poetry. To understand the Indians one must be aware of nature—the sun, earth, and rain; seed fructification, growth, and harvest—the synchronization of life with the cosmic cycle.

Quiriguá is only one of many Máyan cities scattered across the Isthmus from Copán, Honduras, to Chichén Itzá, Yucatan. All these cities were abandoned, as the bees abandon their hives, at their apogee. Mystery and silence shroud the ruins. But, in a nutshell, the history of the Mayas is this: Some prehistoric Luther Burbank discovered that the wild *maíz* could be cultivated and stored; men learned to look upon one another as brothers and to cultivate the fields for the common good; then they recognized special gifts in certain men and released them from labor to direct the building of beautiful cities and monuments. Edwin Markham is right. Man's three essential needs are bread, brotherhood, and beauty.

While I was painting amidst the ruins, the sun began to demonstrate his power. My exposed parts were blistered as if under a burning glass, and I began to realize that this tropic sun was more powerful and sent its rays more directly than the sun I was accustomed to. Soon after three o'clock the shadows began to lengthen from the high walls of the forest, and teasing insects filled the air. I was obliged to call it a day.

All day long I had missed an indefinable something, and as I sauntered pensively homeward I suddenly discovered that it was the absence of the lurid noises travelers ascribe to the tropical jungle. I had expected to be chided by monkeys and pelted with coconuts and to hear hungry jaguars roaring in the bush. Instead nature seemed to hold her breath. The black *sopilotes* circled silently in the crystal sky. The slightest sounds were audible—the faint rustle of leaves caused by the clown-beaked toucans hopping clumsily among the branches, the whispering stir of weeds as a lizard or snake slithered along the earth. I almost fancied at times that I could hear the airy dip and rise of the gorgeous butterflies.

When suddenly a flock of parrots flew over the forest from their feeding grounds, their scolding fractured the silence with an ear-splitting din.

I stopped under a tree to sketch the picturesque native market beside the railroad tracks. Great straw mattings were flung carelessly over poles to shade the heaping baskets of bright vegetables and fruit, beside which the venders in their faded dresses and head cloths squatted phlegmatically. Colored pita fiber ham-



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mocks, bags, and baskets were displayed for sale. In a corner an Indian woman was grinding corn on a stone mortar, while others were patting the meal, or masa, into little round flat cakes, which they placed to bake on a clay griddle resting on stones over an open fire. These were *tortillas*, the Indians' staff of life. A little green parrot was perched on the handle of a basket, but though many passers-by took it on their fingers, fed it, and talked to it, no one seemed to want to buy it. Skinny dogs scavenged the market floor.

In the foreground, men whose faces were dark blots beneath their wide-brimmed straw sombreros, lounged on an idle push car. Men carrying machetes with a certain jaunty style in the crook of their arms, and women with shawl-covered heads walked to and fro, while occasionally a man sitting very erect on a little mule would amble by.

That evening when the Clarks saw the sketch, Don Eddie said, "If you think Quiriguá is interesting, wait until you see the market at Chichicastenango."

They say in Guatemala that you can set your watch by the rain, but fortunately no one does.

The idea, however, holds. From May to November Jupiter Pluvius has a pretty definite schedule for punching the clock; then he goes on a six-months' holiday. Guatemala has a hundred climates, but only two seasons. And since there is no reason why people living in the tropics shouldn't name their own seasons, they call the dry one summer and the wet, winter.

Every year on the average Quiriguá has one hundred and thirty inches of rainfall, and that is no thimbleful. But though I had arrived at the beginning of "winter" I was not greatly hindered by rain. The rains start gradually and during the first two weeks of May, usually fall only at night. Every day they come a little earlier until finally the dripping clouds shut off the sun from the damp earth for days or weeks at a time.

This is the sort of weather that provided the title for a famous drama. It causes the sluggish Motagua to become a raging flood, and to rise as much as sixteen feet above its banks. Then comes a *canicula*—a period of Indian summer. The flood waters recede but not into the old channel. Tropical rivers change their course

as often as a woman changes her mind, to the despair of bridge builders and boundary makers. But the annual overflow of the Motagua brings a gift of rich new soil down from the mountains, to fertilize the land without cost.

Every evening before dinner Don Eddie served "malarial treatment" in the form of Scotch highballs. He said that Dr. MacPhail, the head of the United Fruit Company hospital, advises people living in the tropics to take a drink of whisky at the end of the day—advice few disagree with.

I spent a pleasant afternoon with Dr. MacPhail, up at the hospital. His manner is cordial and charming and free from the clinical air which gives me, with so many doctors, that guinea-pig-in-the-laboratory feeling. It is plain to see why he is universally beloved.

He had *frescoes*, soft drinks, served on the cool second-story porch, from which we could admire the astonishingly beautiful view of the valley with its emerald sea of bananas extending apparently to the distant blue hills which divide Guatemala from Honduras. While we talked over our drinks, I made a pencil sketch of him.

I then inspected the hospital with him. Everything was so up-to-date that I felt easier about being in the pestilential tropics. I had taken no precautions such as inoculations or quinine, and I asked Dr. MacPhail if I should do so.

"If you're careful, nothing, may happen, but if something does, come down here and we'll fix you up," he said.

"In other words, just keep my fingers crossed?"

He smiled.

"At least you won't have a reactionary illness, or load your system with quinine before treatment is necessary."

The greatest menace to health in the tropics is soil and water pollution, but infection from this source can be avoided by drinking only boiled water and eschewing low-growing green vegetables. But of all tropical diseases malaria, which is contracted only on the coast, is the most destructive and difficult to control. Periodic blood tests are taken of all camps, and this eternal vigilance has resulted in the reduction of positive tests from eighty to ten per cent.

There is not much need to fear malaria if you stay behind

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screens after dark, because the anopheles mosquito which carries the disease abhors the light. Only the female is dangerous and she must previously have fed on someone who has malarial parasites in his blood. If a mosquito seems to be standing on its head when biting you, you may be sure it is of the anopheline variety.

When I left for the capital, Dr. MacPhail saw me off at the station and bade me tell Padre Rossbach, the famous priest of Chichicastenango, whom I counted on seeing within a week, that they were expecting him at the hospital for a curative rest. As the train pulled out of Quiriguá, I saw the Clarks waving farewells from their veranda, and I waved back, Indian-fashion, with what would be a come-hither gesture in any other sign language.



### III

## Neon Lights and Native Sights

THE TRAIN followed the Rio Motagua out of the green luxuriance of the coastland into a hilly country of dust and drought and parching heat. Near the villages the banks of the tawny river were brightened by bathers, who squatted in the shallows slothfully dipping up the cooling water in gourd basins and pouring it over their bare torsos. I watched them with envy from our traveling oven.

At noon we reached Zacapa and stopped a half-hour for lunch. Here I saw the Blaisdells and Dr. Roselli, whom I had met a week earlier in Quiriguá. They had visited Antigua and Chichicastenango and now were homeward bound, filled with an almost incoherent enthusiasm for the magnificent colonial ruins and the colorful native life.

"How lucky you are to be able to paint!" Dr. Roselli exclaimed. "We can only look, but you can do something about it. Please let us know when you hold your exhibition in New York."

On the train a soldier again checked the passengers, and when I wrote after my name *artista*, his eyes rounded with excitement.

"Excuse, *señor*," he said, "but are you an *artista* of the *cine*?"

"No," I said, "*artista pintor*."

Perhaps I should have lied. His disillusionment was pathetic.

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As the afternoon advanced, the country straightened into wild mountains clothed with rain forests of oak and pine and slashed by bottomless barrancas over which the train leaped on spidery trestles. The conductor lit the antiquated kerosene lamps for the tunnels, and with the lurching of the train I was anointed by some of their unholy oil. Once the train slowed at a place where men were working on what seemed to be a new cut.

"*Derrumbe*—landslide," explained a fellow passenger.

These occur frequently all over Guatemala, especially during the change of seasons when earthquakes are commoner. Sometimes they necessitate a *trasbordo*—a change of trains across a mass of earth, trees, and boulders.

A chill tang in the air warned that we had passed from the torrid into the temperate zone. Tourists who come to the American tropics with only light sports clothes and sun-tan lotions find that nature has rudely tricked them. For, roughly speaking, every thousand feet of altitude is here equivalent to a thousand miles of latitude. Guatemala, like ancient Gaul, is divided into three parts, but in Guatemala the divisions are vertical and climatic. There are the hot lowlands, or *tierra caliente*, the temperate valleys five thousand feet higher, or *tierra templada*, and the cold highlands above seven thousand feet, or *tierra fria*.

Guatemala City, which I reached toward six in the evening, lies in a broad fertile valley in the *tierra templada*.

It is called a modern capital and with good reason. It has paved streets and taxis, while Sixth Avenue, with its modernistic store fronts and neon signs, might be the main street of any town of a hundred and forty thousand souls in the United States.

But this modernity is a recent veneer. The country is 85 per cent Indian, and you have only to walk a few blocks west of Sixth Avenue to find the primitive life that is so carefully shunted off the main thoroughfares. I made this discovery next morning when I looked down from my window at the Hotel Gran on Eighth Avenue upon an astonishing confusion of ancient and modern cultures. But actually there was no intermingling. The primitive current flowed through the civilized as unpolluted as the Gulf Stream through the Atlantic.

Let the angry auto sirens scold as they would, the lumbering oxcarts which blocked their way moved no faster. The dull-

eyed, slaving oxen were not to be hurried even by the cries and goads of their drivers. The Indians, brilliantly arrayed in tribal costumes, hurried to market with all their wares, scarcely deigning to glance at the fairer-skinned populace in conventional European dress. Nor were the heavily burdened, big-calved *cargadores* any more mindful of the modern American trucks which brushed rudely past them. All these Indians poured into the city from the outlying villages, bringing with them the produce and the handicrafts of their respective regions to the big central market.

Indian women wear a tunic blouse called a *guipil* \* and a long wrap-around skirt, or *corte*, but every tribe has its own color scheme, designs, and accessories. They carry themselves very straight and move with the swift slipping grace of jungle cats. I nearly fell out of the window while trying to get a better look at a beautiful girl from San Juan Sacatepequez. Her features had a haunting touch of the Far East and seemed to be carved from fresh-cut cedar. A fillet of black and purple yarn was plaited with the braid encircling her head and the fringed ends hung to her shoulders behind each silver-bobbed ear. The rich color of her skin blended miraculously with the strong red, yellow, and blue dyes of her costume; and on her head was balanced a huge shallow basket of long-stemmed cut flowers still glistening with mountain dew. I wanted to call out and ask her to pose for me.

Just then a friend came into the room, and I dragged him to the window. Pointing out my beauty, I asked him what chance I had to get her for a model. He was a man who knew the country.

"None at all, I'm afraid," he said.

"Why not?"

"She would be ostracized by her village."

"Are they really that strict?"

He nodded. "Especially in San Juan."

"Well, I've got to have another look at her," I said, reaching for my hat. "See you later."

But she had vanished in the throng. I saw other San Juaneras in equally stunning costumes, but not the beautiful flower girl.

\* Pronounced weepel.

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Having come to the big central market in my search, I now gave it up to marvel at the teeming life and vivid color. Guatemala City was not all modernistic store fronts and neon lights. Here was a scene older than the capital itself.

From all I had heard of tropical markets, I expected to find a malodorous jumble of meats, fish, and fruit, but this one was free from sights and smells of the wrong sort. The whole central aisle was banked with cut flowers, the scent of which mingled with the savory odors of cooking, reminding me that I hadn't eaten since—could it be only two hours ago? The tropics had done something to my appetite; I was always ready to eat. Not quite daring to sample any of the cooked dishes, I tried some *glacéed* native fruits—*camotes*, green figs, and chilacayotes—and found them delicious.

Then I took a turn of all the little stalls, no bigger than shower baths, where there were countless things to catch the eye: clay pottery, hammocks of colored pita fiber, carved and painted gourds, baskets, bags, and rush mattings, not to mention a tantalizing assortment of gay textiles. My sales resistance would have been reduced to nil if I hadn't reminded myself that I had plenty of time to consider purchases.

At the heels of every housewife trotted a bundle-laden servant, usually dressed in the costume of Quezaltenango. No Guatemalteca ever carries a package or lifts a finger. Everything is done for her by Indian servants. That is one reason time kills hard; she has nothing to occupy her but bridge.

Food prices were fantastically low. You could buy a hundred bananas for a quarter, a fine avocado for two cents, first quality meats for from twelve to twenty cents a pound, fresh eggs for eighteen cents a dozen, and fifty *tortillas* from Mixco, ten miles away, and still warm from the griddle, for only five cents. It is quite safe to eat anything you like so long as it is cooked and provided you don't overindulge in native dishes. Our stomachs aren't built to take it. But meats are inspected and sanitary laws enforced. Everybody who handles foodstuffs is required to wear a head covering and to pass a negative Wassermann test.

Since I was going into the highlands so soon, I thought it a good idea to visit the relief map out at Minerva Park in order

to get the lay of the land. This captivating work stands next to the Temple of Minerva, one of those bastard-Greek monuments to the Higher Life which Cabrera scattered through every hamlet, village, and town during his presidency.

The map was constructed in 1905 by an engineer named Francisco Vela. It covers one hundred and fifty square feet and shows all the important peaks, plains, and waterways. At either end is a tower, and climbing one of these, I looked down upon the map as from a captive balloon suspended over the Mexican border.

Topographically, Guatemala is like the little girl who was either very, very good or else so bad she was horrid. It is a land of extremes, either of flatness or verticality. The Pacific coastal plain extends inland for thirty miles with a barely perceptible rise, and then the mountains swoop suddenly skyward in an incredible series of scarifying volcanic peaks: Tacaná, Taju-mulco, Santa Maria, Zunil, Santa Cruz, San Pedro, Atitlán, Tolimán, Acatenango, Fuego, Agua, Pacaya, and Tecuamburo. Beyond these bristling sentinels are the lofty Cuchumatanes, and then the land sinks into the flat again in the great Petén jungle, which occupies a third of the horizontal area of Guatemala.

One glance at the map makes it clear why the Indian life has never been Hispanicized, westernized, or mechanized, and at the same time makes the history of the Conquest more unbelievable than ever.

Guatemala is seen to lie east and west, due to the radical twist of the Isthmus. I had entered from the north and traveled in a southwesterly direction to the capital, four-fifths of the distance across the country. From here the railroad drops swiftly and almost due south down to the Pacific port of San José. The railroad is the line of demarcation between the two main divisions of the country—the Oriente and the Occidente, the East and the West. When Guatemaltecos speak of the "Port" they mean Barrios, and when they speak of "La Costa" they refer to the coastal plain along the Pacific.

In area the Oriente is less than half that of the Occidente, and it contains only one point of interest—the shrine of the Black Christ at Esquipulas. This figure of the crucified Christ was executed by the Guatemaltecan sculptor Quirio Cataño in



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1594 and is enshrined in an impressive basilica of the colonial period. It soon gained a reputation for performing miracles which it has maintained to the present day. Esquipulas is the Lourdes of Central America.

Many subtle explanations are offered for the dark color of the Christ, but interpret it how you will, the fact remains that it appeals directly to a dark-skinned people. Tocsika Roach once showed me an old altar panel which she has among the colonial treasures in her home in the capital. It is set in a wrought-iron frame and operates on a swivel, as on each side of the panel is a painting of the Crucifixion, identical in every respect except that in one the Christ is white and in the other, black. The wily priest who conceived this trick was clearly up on his psychology, and it may have been the same with Cataño.

There is one peculiar defect in the panel of the Crucifixion: in both versions the figure of the Virgin is white. When I pointed this out to Mrs. Roach, she said laughingly:

"Anything can happen in Guatemala!"

The great interest of Guatemala centers in the Occidente, the land of the Quichés, Cakchiquels, Zutujils, and Mams. From my preparatory reading I had already gleaned that this was the region of the most beautiful scenery, the finest climate, and the most fertile valleys, occupied by some two million Indians whose daily life has undergone little change since the conquering Spaniards under Alvarado rode down from Mexico four centuries ago. This book is the story of how I came to know this ancient Indian kingdom by the devious but interesting method of trial and error in the course of more than a year's wanderings.

Gazing down upon the miniature reproduction of the highlands of the Occidente, I traced with anticipatory pleasure the route I would soon take to enter this romantic region. To reach Chichicastenango I would first pass through the ruined colonial capital of Antigua and then skirt the northern shore of Lake Atitlán. My next objective would be Quezaltenango, once the Quiché stronghold of Xelajú, which outlandish name still clings to it. And from there . . .

While Quiriguá was still fresh in my memory, I wanted to visit the archeological museum, which I found at Aurora Park on the opposite outskirts of the city. The museum has an amazingly fine collection of Mayan relics and artifacts, thanks

to the Carnegie Institute, which has presented them to it from their findings at Copán, Quiriguá, Uaxactún, and Kaminal Juyú.

These latter ruins had just been discovered almost within the city limits and are considered the most exciting find in recent years.

It came about, it seems, as the result of the rage for *futbol* which has swept the youth of Guatemala. Every open space was coveted for a soccer field, and the plain of Kaminal Juyú, just outside the city on the road to Mixco, offered a world of room except for the mounds which dot the area and give it its name, the Valley of the Dead. There are some three hundred of these mounds, and they are not natural hillocks but the *cués* of a Mayan city which have been covered over in the course of centuries by earth and vegetation. A *cué* is simply a truncated pyramidal masonry base for a house or shrine, and it is seldom that anything of value is found by opening them.

So the mounds of Kaminal Juyú were undisturbed until the demand arose to cut back two opposing ones to make a soccer field. When work was started the laborers' picks and shovels struck against some ancient stucco. The government was notified and permission granted the Carnegie Institute to investigate.

Perhaps nothing very exciting would have resulted if Dr. Oliver G. Ricketson, Jr. and Dr. A. V. Kidder had not approached their work gingerly by commencing a trench some distance from the *cué*. As they worked nearer, they uncovered the tomb of a king. The pottery found within this tomb is of great significance because it corresponds with specimens from Uaxactún and forms the first link between the highland and lowland cultures.

Other tombs were discovered, and from them came more rare vases, pieces of jade, necklaces, bracelets, breastplates, ear plugs, obsidian knives and arrow heads, and one of the finest and most interesting idols ever found. Some of the jade pieces are carved with marvelous artistry. The cornice of one of the pyramids was painted with characters in red outline, and within the pyramid was found an unworked block of jade weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, the largest known single piece of jade in America.

Jade, or jadeite, was valued by the Mayas and Aztecs far

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above gold; so when any quantity of jade jewelry is found in a tomb it denotes the high rank of the person buried there. American jade has so far been found only in the tombs and debris of Mayan cities; its natural source is unknown. This would seem to give color to the theory that it was brought to this country from Asia, thus proving a pre-Columbian connection between the two continents. But scientists say, No. American jade differs in quality from that found anywhere else in the world.

On account of the rainy season, work had been suspended for six months, but the following "summer" I had an opportunity to visit the excavations when they had been reopened, and to watch Dr. Kidder and his assistants at work.

Somehow I had imagined that archeology was a thrilling pursuit. I fancied that you dug excitedly, like a pup in a squirrel hole, until you uncovered some priceless object of art. But I was cruelly disillusioned. An archeologist does not indulge in frenzied earth-tossing. The pick-and-shovel work is all done before his job begins. I watched for three hours while Dr. Kidder, with the patience of a Yogi, dusted off old bones with a chicken feather and placed fragments of jade and pottery in matchboxes with eyebrow tweezers. Archeology undoubtedly has its thrills but they are not thrillingly arrived at.

In that tomb beside the skeleton of the king, or high cacique, were two other skeletons. Who, I asked Dr. Kidder, were those others?

"Wives or slaves, perhaps," he said.

A simple answer, until you stop to consider how they met their death at the same time as their lord. Did the wives and slaves of Mayan princes immolate themselves on their husband's or master's bier?

Among those who stood around the rim of the tomb watching the work was an aged Indian woman. She stared into the pit with troubled eyes, and I overheard her say that since the excavations were started *luc*es, lights, had been seen at night over the ruins and that white figures walked the fields and frightened passers-by. It was not good, she declared, to disturb the spirits of the dead.

Before leaving for the highlands I went to see *Señor* Delfino Sanchez Latour, who is chief of protocol and president of the tourist bureau. My call was by appointment and I found on my arrival at the foreign ministry that he had invited reporters from the three daily newspapers to interview me. Also present was an American writer named Sherwood, who was collaborating with *Señor* Latour in some publicity. Sherwood offered to handle the reporters and so left me free to talk with *Señor* Latour.

Thanks to his Oxford education and former service as Guatemalan consul in New York, the chief of protocol speaks perfect and fluent English. He is a handsome, intellectual, and energetic man, and among his surprising gifts is a genuine talent for art. On the wall of his office was a large oil painting of Lake Atitlán.

"I painted it from memory," he said. "I was on a motorcycle trip with the Old Man and we passed the lake. This scene stayed in my mind and so I painted it."

He always referred affectionately to the president as the Old Man, as do most Guatemaltecos. It is a good sign when a leader is known by his *apodo*, or nickname. It indicates popularity.

The Indians call President Ubico Tata, or Little Father. And it is significant that both nicknames are paternal.

The president is acute, enlightened, and patriotic. When he "took the guava," as the local saying goes, the country had had a presidential rash: two presidents of a day left the country on the same boat. But General Ubico has a firm hand. He has given the country an honest, stable, and progressive government. When his six-year term expired, he was re-elected by a plebiscite. A high-energy type, he works hard and plays hard, rises very early, never needs rest, wears everyone out but himself. He enjoys hunting, riding, and the sport of presidents. Speed is his mania and motorcycles his passion.

*Señor* Latour showed me some of his delightful pen drawings of Guatemalan scenes, and we talked art, artists, and printing processes until no time was left to discuss the country I was about to visit. But I had made a valued friend.

On my last evening in the capital I walked up to the Cerro

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del Carmen, one of two *cerritos*, or little hills, which face each other across the flat roofs of the city. This of El Carmen is crowned by an ancient church, one hundred and fifty years older than the capital itself, while the other is topped by a gray fort, built not for defense but for the pacification of the citizenry. Many a time its guns have raked the city with shot and shell. An American who has lived in the capital some fifty-odd years, once showed me a boxful of bullets and fragments of shrapnel taken from the walls of his home.

"These are souvenirs of having been the neighbor of three presidents," he said.

The church of Nuestra Señora del Carmen is one of the most interesting structures in the country. Unlike the many-columned and floridly decorated churches in the colonial style, it is solid and fortress-like, with towers that look more like gun turrets than campaniles.

In 1620, when the church was built to shelter a certain devotee hermit and a beautiful silver statuette of the Virgin which he had brought from Spain, there was only a small cluster of ranchos at the foot of the Cerro; and the valley was a grazing land for great herds of cattle, and was then called the Valle de Las Vacas, the Valley of the Cows. But by 1776, when the capital was removed from Antigua to its present site, the plain had already come to be called the Valley of the Hermit.

I stood on the parapet by the great stone cross and looked out over the valley to where the craters of Agua, Fuego, and Acatenango loomed darkly against the southwestern horizon. A plume of white smoke stood over the cone of Fuego. These volcanoes have, in the course of four hundred years, destroyed three capitals.

The first capital was effaced in 1543 when Agua (Water) erupted and released a flood of water and boulders from a rift in its side. A new capital was founded a few miles away, only to be shaken down by Fuego (Fire) in 1773. Then the discouraged Spaniards decided to move away from such close proximity to destruction, and loading their household gods upon the backs of Indian slaves, came thirty miles over the mountains to the seeming peace of the Valley of the Hermit. But in 1917

the villain Fuego again became active and shook the earth so violently over a period of a month that hardly a building in the city was left standing. The present Guatemala City really dates from this catastrophe.

But as I gazed toward the Occidente, I was not thinking of the ever-present threat of the glowering volcanoes, but of the strange and beautiful land which they dominate and which I would begin to know for myself on the morrow.



## IV

### A House in Antigua

**R**OLLING ACROSS the stone bridge that spans the tiny Rio Pensativo, the crowded ancient touring car that had brought me from Guatemala City, entered the cobbled streets of the colonial capital of Antigua. I was reminded of a line from one of Robert Louis Stevenson's essays in which he says that cathedrals are his favorite form of mountain scenery. R. L. S. would have reveled in Antigua, where every cloister church is of cathedral dimensions, and there are a good round score of them.

When we reached the drowsy plaza our driver came to a sudden squeaky stop, the rear doors popped open and disgorged all sizes and shapes of humans, who began at once to breathe and recover the use of their limbs. I was about to get out too, but the driver told me to remain seated and he would take me to my lodgings.

So while the car was being excavated from beneath layers of luggage, I looked about me.

We were parked near the steps of the old city hall, or Palacio del Muy Noble Ayuntamiento as it was called in colonial days, which has survived repeated earthquakes and is still used by the chief officers of the municipality. A few soldiers in blue uniforms with white striped trousers lounged about the entrance holding their inevitable rifles.

There was hardly a stir in the Plaza de Armas. A few people sat dreamily on the benches in the peaceful shade of the pepper trees.

A Spanish woman swathed in a black lace mantilla slowly ascended the broad flight of steps to the restored chapel which has served as the cathedral since the fateful earthquake of Santa Marta shattered that magnificent edifice. From the deliberate click of her high heels I thought she might be meditating a confession.

Directly across the plaza, but largely concealed by the trees of the park, I saw the beautiful double porticoed Palace of the Captains General, still flaunting the Hapsburg coat of arms. Above it loomed the green cone of the sleeping volcano of Agua.

In olden days, there was no park, and the Plaza Real, as it was then called, was a scene of unceasing color and movement, or on days when there was not a tournament, pageant, bullfight, or native fiesta, it was given over to the local market.

When the last passenger had reclaimed his belongings, the driver drove me to the house of Mr. Logan.

We had not far to go. Only to the corner and then down one side of the plaza across from which ran a low building with an arcaded corridor filled with small shops and—of all things—a movie.

Then we passed the Royal Mint, where were coined the curious *macacos*, those thick irregular silver coins stamped with the arms of Spain, which are still seen in Guatemala spaced between the red beads of the Indian women's necklaces.

Rounding the next corner we turned into the street behind the Palace of the Captains-General and stopped before a house with beautiful carved wooden grilles over the windows. I got out and knocked upon the huge double doors of the *zaguán*. The immediate response was a shrill barking from within. A few moments later the key grated in the lock and I was admitted by a barefoot Indian woman.

"*Está Señor Logan?*" I asked.

"*Si, Señor. Pase adelante,*" she said.

The barks, which were emitted by two small white balls of fluff, persisted.



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"Chispa! Chupie!" reprimanded an invisible bass voice, "hold your tongues!"

I stepped into the *zaguán* and was brought up short by an astonishing view of Agua, which filled the farther end of the arch like a mural painting.

While I stood admiring, the bass voice materialized into a tall, thin gray-haired American, with a pleasant smile that came from the eyes as well as the lips. He explained at once, as if politely offering me a chance to change my mind about remaining, that I would find the house half in ruins, but I promptly assured him that to me that would be more than half its charm.

Known as the Casa de Rodil from its present owners, the house was built in 1650 by a grandee of Spain and was one of the finest private dwellings in the colonial capital. Beauty and dignity still cling to the decaying walls and timbers like a priceless mantle.

Following the old Spanish design for living, there is a central patio surrounded by an arcaded corridor, of which only two sides remain intact.

Rounded columns of durable cedar on chipped stone bases uphold the heavy time-stained tiled roof, where the black turkey buzzards sun themselves. Vines creep up the aged columns, between which are suspended baskets of spidery ferns, while at their bases are placed ancient wine jars from Madeira and Aragon, each a fountain of greenery and scarlet flowers.

Unglazed red tiles floor the corridors and rooms. The latter had white-plastered walls five feet through, covered with old religious paintings, carved-wood bas-reliefs, and hangings of native textiles.

Mr. Logan introduced me to Doña Elena, his young and pretty Guatemalan wife, who did not speak a word of English, although very little English escaped her.

A year before, the Lejaren Hillers of New York had been here. I told the Logans it was through the Hillers that I had first heard of Guatemala, whereupon Doña Elena disappeared into her room and returned with sketches "Señor Eeeler" had made of herself and "Don Cleeford." From that moment I was no longer a stranger.

I asked to see more of the house, and they took me through



The Casa de Rodil was built  
in 1650 by a grandee of Spain

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the *sala*, the dining room, and their own sleeping quarters, all furnished with genuine colonial pieces.

Steps led up to the deep window seats, glazed with bright blue and yellow Spanish tiles. Here the pretty *señoritas* with high combs and lace mantillas to hide their blushes, used to coquet with their *novios* through the window grilles under the vigilant eye of a duenna.

In Doña Elena's room was a reproduction of the Mona Lisa.

"Ramona, our cook, insists that it looks like me and must be my aunt," said Doña Elena with a gay laugh.

All the other rooms were unfurnished, except for the one I was to occupy, which had only a bed, a washstand, and some rush *petates* on the floor. It had no windows, being lighted only from the wide doorway. The ceilings of the rooms were eighteen feet high and had lateral beams of hand-dressed timbers.

At the far end of the main corridor was a little oratory with a statue of the patron saint of the house. Close by was the ancient kitchen, the most interesting room of all.

In this dark room, *Ramona*, by the light of a tallow candle, prepared our meals on the most primitive sort of stove, called a *poyo*. The high, soot-blackened domed ceiling served as a chimney and the smoke escaped through slits in a little cupola at the top. At the far end of the *poyo* was a small Dutch oven for baking bread, the kneaded dough being placed in the oven with some hot stones and the entrance sealed up until it was baked through.

A revolving server was set into an opening in one of the walls communicating with an adjoining room, which was originally the dining room, but which was now roofless and filled with weed-grown debris.

Here Mr. Logan had been doing some treasure hunting, for a fortune of \$100,000 is believed to be hidden somewhere in the house. A large sum was found by a former occupant, and Mr. Logan's lease stipulated that he give the landlord ten per cent of any spoils he should uncover. In this attempt, he had not located any booty but he had brought to light a well-constructed subterranean chamber with a caved-in passage apparently communicating with the mint across the street.

Near the kitchen is a small service patio, with a pink-walled

*pila*, or water tank, stocked with goldfish to keep it free from mosquito larvae, and the only modern installation—a lavatory. All the rest of the house is in utter decay. In what may once have been a grand *sala* I found a large indigo plant, from which the Indians made the deep blue dye for their cotton yarn.

That night I learned what happens to Americans who think they can eat with impunity all they want of *salpicón*, *gallo en chicha*, *frijoles con queso*, and *plátano en mole*.

When we sat in that romantic setting, consuming those strange native dishes by candlelight, with barefoot Ramona trotting silently down the long dark corridor to the kitchen and back, the flame of her candle throwing her dilated shadow all over the patio, I was having grand fun and believed I was getting away with it. But about two o'clock the next morning I realized that I hadn't. I had let myself in for a severe attack of what the foreign contingent call "Guatemala complaint." By the time the sun had fully risen, I had a weak pulse and no appetite or ambition. As I lay weakly in bed, I heard low voices outside my door. At first I paid no attention, but having inadvertently caught the word *beso* (kiss) I pricked up my ears.

"*Deme un besito*," wheedled a young man's voice.

"*Déjeme!*" answered the voice of a girl, simulating annoyance and severity.

Surely, I thought, that couldn't be poor, homely Ramona. If a young man asked her for one little kiss, she would hardly be the one to tell him to leave her alone. He might take her seriously! Then I recalled that there were two other servants, a handsome Indian girl and youth, whom I had taken to be lovers.

"Only one!"

"No, I tell you. Go away."

But he didn't, and she did. There was a very audible smack.

"How good!" exclaimed the delighted youth. "Give me another."

"No, no," weakly.

More smacks.

"Ah! how sweet!"

There was a wild burst of giggling followed by momentary

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silence. Then the girl's voice said, "*Figurese!*" (Imagine it!), and there was more giggling.

Then I heard the tapping of Doña Elena's heels coming down the corridor, and Romeo and Juliet went off the air.

I dressed and went in to breakfast, but it was no go. When the Logans saw I wasn't well, they asked the cause, and Doña Elena ordered Ramona to make me some Yerba Buena tea. Tea and unbuttered toast is the local specific for "Guatemala complaint."

I put a comfortable chair out in the warming sun and after drinking the tea, pulled myself together sufficiently to start a sketch of the patio. While I was drawing, Doña Elena entered the patio holding a small parrot on her index finger, and I hastily sketched her in. Mr. Logan, who had been watching over my shoulder, laughed and called out:

"Mr. Burbank has just put you in his picture, Elena—you and *el loro*."

Then he said, "I hope the parrot didn't disturb you this morning."

"Parrot? Why no," I said.

"Thought he might have as he was right outside your door. Elena took him away because he was raising such a ruckus. He's an amusing cuss. Came from a *finca* on the coast. Cage used to hang where he could hear the *mozos* making love to the house servants."

Just then the bird began to giggle insanely.

"*Figurese!*" he screamed.

Before I left Guatemala City I had arranged with Clark's Tours to have the Mayan Inn supply-truck pick me up in Antigua and take me on to Chichicastenango, as this seemed to be the only way I could get there without hiring a private car. So during the early afternoon the truck arrived, my bags were thrown in with the beef and vegetables, and I bade good-by to the Logans and Antigua. I was to visit both again, however, as I will tell in a later chapter.

## V

### A Look at Lake Atitlán

**O**UR ROAD wound about the brows of breathless precipices, wriggled like a snake in and out of deep barrancas, and plunged through treacherous streams. A grim country, this highland Guatemala, gnawed by erosion, molded by earthquakes, and swept by erratic rivers. Sunless forests of oak, pine, and cypress clothe the deep folds of the mountains, except for the burnt lava pinnacles of the volcanoes. A grim country, yes; but a country of unsurpassed beauty and grandeur.

Once we encountered a fresh landslide. But an American steam shovel, the only one I ever saw in the country, had already gouged out a gap wide enough for us to pass, and Arnulfo eased the car through.

Arnulfo, like most Indians, was a good driver. In a mountainous country you have to be good or you don't drive long.

"There are many landslides at this season," he said in Spanish.

"Don't people ever get caught by them?" I asked.

"*Como no*," he nodded. "Sufficient. Cars, too."

Comforting, that. But I was too diverted by the sights of the road to consider the risks. There was hardly a mile that was not enlivened by passing Indians whose strong red and blue costumes contrasted with the tawny road. Each nimble figure carried its load. The women carried bundles on their heads and

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babies pick-a-back. The men were bent forward under bureau-like carrying frames, or *cacaxtes*, supported by leather headbands across the forehead.

It is a mistake to bracket all these men as *cargadores*. A *cargador* is a hired porter, or burden carrier. The rest are traveling peddlers or merchants. The meanest are called *achineros*; the better class, *buboneros*. Besides articles for sale, they also carry a *petate*, or rush mat, to sleep on, a wool blanket, an oil lamp called a *candil*, *totoposte*, a kind of hard, thick *tortilla*, and a gourd of *atole*, a gruel made from parched corn, or coffee. Thus they are equipped to spend any number of days and nights on the road.

Every few miles we passed thatched *ranchitos*, where the Indians were resting and refreshing themselves with coffee or *atole*, heated over an open fire.

As the costumes of the Indians we saw now were unknown to me, I asked Arnulfo what villages they came from. He named them readily, Patzicía, Patzúm, Sololá. The variations possible within the simple limits of *guipil* and skirt were astounding.

"How many different costumes are there in Guatemala?" I asked.

"Sufficient," he said.

"Are they all as colorful as the ones I have already seen?"

"*Como no*," he said.

"I know of no other country where the people are more colorful than the landscape," I remarked.

"*Como no?*"

"It interests me because I am a painter."

"*Como no!*"

"*Como no*" means yes, but it may also be inflected to mean "Is that so?", "You don't say!", or almost anything. I have heard two Guatemaltecos talk for ten minutes without any other reply to their respective questions and statements beyond the variant, "*Como no chon!*" which means "You bet!"

A preponderance of awning-striped *guipiles* and cerulean plaid skirts announced the nearness of a village, and soon we entered the considerable town of Patzúm. Arnulfo stopped in front of the town hall and pointed to the colonial church which

stood on a rise beyond a little park. I recalled that Mr. Logan had told me it was worth seeing, and I inspected it but with more haste perhaps than it deserved.

Patzúm's slanting main street is spanned by an old stone bridge. The street was dry now, but six months later when I came through the town again with my wife, water from a tropical shower rushed in a brown flood under the bridge almost even with the running board, and she was puzzled as to why we should drive in the middle of a river instead of over it.

Arnulfo was still young, and I observed that he waved to some girl friend in almost every adobe village through which we passed. I asked if they were all *novias* of his, and he smiled but not boastfully. Indians have no Freudian complexes. They do not think about life, they live. They believe that a man should have a woman according to his need, and they have no red-light districts nor sexual inhibitions beyond reasonably tolerant tribal laws.

Of a sudden Arnulfo swerved off the road and into a small clearing where he brought the car to a stop.

"Engine trouble?" I queried.

He shook his head and pointed to a narrow path that slipped downward through the brush.

"Beautiful view," he said.

In a country where beautiful views are a drug on the market it seemed a needless waste of energy to so much as get out of the car. But I did so, and descending the path a short distance, came out upon the brow of a toppling cliff from which I gazed with awe into the depths of a gargantuan crater, carved from the core of the Cordilleras, wherein lay the unsounded waters, blue as the Virgin's robe, of Lake Atitlán.

Como and Tahoe are beautiful mountain lakes, but Atitlán transcends the beautiful. It appears to have been created by some unimaginable, beginning-of-time upheaval that tore out the heart of the mountains. In the vast broken cavity five thousand feet above the sea, and some seventy miles in circumference, lie the deep blue waters, fed by rains, rivers, and secret springs. Their outlet, if any, is a mystery. Scarred by cuts and crevices, the crater walls rise two thousand feet and more to



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great mesas, except where the continuity is broken by three volcanoes, whose cloudy cones are dwarfed in the immensity of space.

From my eerie ledge I descried several Indian villages perched above the water, their white churches gleaming like pearls. But a south wind was tossing big cottony clouds over the bulky shoulders of the volcanoes. They rolled over the rippling surface of the lake and bumped along the perpendicular walls of the great lava bowl unable to find a way out. In time the blue waters were submerged under a sea of sudsy clouds.

I returned to the car. Arnulfo was squatting on the running board and the quantity of cigarette butts on the ground at his feet showed how far I had tested his patience.

Before long we descended a tremendous barranca and came to the broad, turbulent Panajachel River dashing through a channel of heaped-up white boulders. Without hesitating, Arnulfo plunged the car into the swift current which swirled above the hubcaps and, bumping violently over the stony bed, crossed to the other bank. This is a very dangerous ford. I never passed again without seeing a car or two bogged down in it.

Owing to the steep pitch of these mountain streams a single torrential downpour may cause a quick rise of five or six feet. Drivers trapped at such times have had to abandon their cars as a roaring wall of water, boulders, and trees rolled down upon them.

Soon we entered the leafy village of Panajachel, at the other extremity of which we branched off to the Hotel Monterrey, a low rambling wooden building beset on one side by Lake Atitlán, and on the other by banana, orange, and coffee trees.

This was my first sight of growing coffee. I had often wondered what sort of plant produced the beverage which is the daily eye-opener of millions of people all over the world. Now I saw a shrub growing to a height of about six feet with a sheeny dark green ovate leaf. A few starry white flowers still clung to the drooping stems along which clusters of green berries were forming. Bananas were set out among the coffee shrubs, their shield-like leaves providing the shade so necessary to the proper ripening of the delicate berries. Coffee is Guatemala's chief income-producing crop.

While I was examining the coffee plantation, I was approached by a short elderly man, so bronzed from long years in the tropics that I mistook him for a native. I was equally surprised by his English accent and his words.

"You are Mr. Burbank, I take it. I've been expecting you."

He was Juan Vickers, English owner of the Monterrey, who has lived on these shores for forty years. When I asked him how he happened to know about me, he handed me a copy of the *Liberal-Progresista*, on the front page of which I saw the headline, "PAINTER WHO MEETS HIMSELF IN GUATEMALA." Then I remembered the reporters I had met in *Señor* Latour's office and with whom Sherwood had talked in my stead. I was amused to read that he had told them that I would have an exhibition of my paintings in the capital before returning to the United States. I little dreamed that it was a true prophecy and that, at the time, I would be fighting for my life in a native hospital.

The predatory waters of Lake Atitlán have stolen Mr. Vickers' beach, as they have filched the docks and waterfronts of the vacation homes of wealthy Englishmen and Guatemaltecos. Trees stand in the water with only their topmost branches showing. The rise has been steady for several years and now amounts to some thirty feet. Nervous property owners were pressing the government to build a drainage canal.

I stood where the transparent waters gently lapped the pebbly shore and looked across the wide expanse of the lake toward the volcanoes of Tolimán, Atitlán, and San Pedro, which from this perspective regained their proper awesomeness. Clouds hugged the wrinkled and forested slopes but did not conceal the glowering purple pinnacles.

At the foot of Tolimán is a strange and mysterious hump called the Cerro de Oro—Hill of Gold—a name which suggests buried treasure. And no one knows whether this is a natural formation or the long-buried ruin of a Mayan edifice. Efforts of scientists to investigate have been doggedly blocked by the aborigines.

The slanting sun filled the deep gullies of the mountains with purple shadows as we left Panajachel for Chichicastenango.

The road to Sololá is steep and tortuous and full of scenic

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interest. We passed a waterfall, the tiny hamlet of San Jorge nestled in a fold of the hills, and saw Lake Atitlán in a new perspective with every upward turn.

Sololá men are great merchants and traders. You meet them almost everywhere. They are easily identified by their red-sleeved shirts, striped woolen jackets, checked woolen *rodilleras* or aprons, and peppermint-striped three-quarter length pantaloons. They may also be known by their black and white shoulder bags or *mextates*, which they themselves knit.

As we wound deeper and deeper into the Mayan highlands, they became more and more like our own north woods except for the occasional milpa or cornpatch, and the thatched or tiled Indian ranchos. Frequently we met groups of red-sashed Indian men working out their road-tax, for the government has dedicated itself to a program of road building and is pushing it hard.

At other times we surprised whole families gypsy along the highway with horses and mules relieving the men, but not the women, of their loads. The Indians would all scamper to the sides of the road and look back over their shoulders at us with grins of fright. Mules that had been well trained would head into the bank and stand quietly; those that had not, would break madly down the embankment or gallop in front of the car for a mile or more.

Once on topping a rise, we saw an Indian drop a big log in the middle of the road and then dash into the brush. Arnulfo was barely able to stop the car in time. He got out and removed the obstruction, tossing it, with a few pat remarks, into the brush whence we had seen the man disappear. The incident showed that there still exists among the Indians a resentment of the coming of the machine age.

While we were negotiating our last barranca, the sun sank behind the western mountains and the brief tropic twilight barely permitted us time to reach Chichicastenango before nightfall.

The town came suddenly into view as we rounded a sharp turn. For a moment we looked down upon the red tile roofs of the white houses and then, crossing a narrow ridge like a natural causeway, we entered Chichicastenango itself. An unevenly cobbled street walled by low windowless houses which

give the village an uninhabited look, brought us to a large plaza, across which two beautiful white churches face each other. Crossing this plaza, we entered the street of the Mayan Inn.

I was met by the genial German manager, Don Juan Rohrmann, who assigned me a room on a private patio. As a result of my illness the previous night and a day of fasting, I was utterly exhausted, and the piercing cold of the mountains chilled me like an ice bath. Foregoing dinner, I went immediately to bed.

That bed deserves a special paragraph. It had a Simmons Beautyrest mattress and was the first and almost the last comfortable bed I was to know in Guatemala. But in addition to the sybaritic luxury of a spring mattress, an inspired management was responsible for warming the fresh linen sheets with a hot water bottle.



## VI

### Saints and Idols: Chichicastenango

WHEN THE Spaniards shepherded the Indians into villages the better to make good Catholics of them, they named each village after one of the saints. But as there weren't saints enough to go round, the number of San Juans, Santiagos, and Santo Tomás multiplied to infinity. If the Indians hadn't thrown in a few names of their own, the result would be absolute confusion.

As it is, the names of the towns on the map, as Clancy complains in *Cabbages and Kings*, are an "inch long, small type." "But," says he, "by the foresight of Providence, Guatemala lies on the coast, so the geography man can run them off into the water."

Santo Tomás Chichicastenango is an example. It is such a mouthful and penful that we impatient whites reduce it to Chichicastenango, or what is worse, just Chichi.

Indian nomenclature being always descriptive, Chichicastenango means "place of (*nango*) *chichicaste* (a nettle)." The Indian for Tomás is Max (pronounced Mahsh), which explains why the Indians of this village are commonly called Maxeños.

I had arrived in Chichicastenango on a Saturday evening, and the next morning after breakfast when I went out to see

the town I found, on reaching the plaza, the great Sunday market in full swing.

Coming upon it unforewarned, I was literally stunned by the profusion of colors and the immensity of the crowd. The market in the capital was nothing compared to this.

Thousands of brilliantly costumed Indians, who since early morning had come up from the lake and down from the hills with their livestock, fruits, pottery, and textiles, filled the tree-bordered plaza between the two graceful milk-white churches. They had set up their portable *tiendas* or taken their places in the market's dust, and now, in a holiday spirit, were buying and selling and passing the time of day.

But they had not come only for trade and gossip.

From a sooty altar at the foot of the high pyramidal steps leading up to the entrance of the main church rose wavering streamers of black smoke, scenting the air with the pungent perfume of burning copal—incense to saints and idols.

The steps were blackened by loiterers and worshipers with swinging clay censers who fumigated themselves before entering the great arched portal of the church.

The entire scene was essentially pre-conquest, preserving the traditional union of market, holiday, and religious pilgrimage. I had never seen anything like it. Here was nothing to remind me of home or of any place I had ever been. All was totally unfamiliar and foreign-looking; it was the most unadulteratedly foreign scene I had ever gazed upon.

I made a slow turn of the plaza, threading the narrow aisles between the venders, and discovered that a definite plan underlay the apparent confusion. Butcher, baker, and candlestick maker each had his appointed place. Even the women who squatted on their bare heels before small piles of bananas, oranges, *granadillas*, *anonas*, and other tropical produce knew their exact places on the naked earth. They wrapped small purchases in pieces of banana leaves and bound them with bits of vine in the absence of paper and twine. Sellers of *maíz*, or corn, weighed the yellow kernels in hand-balances under the hawk-like scrutiny of the buyers, who knew well enough to beware. Butchers kept their meats in screened counters unprotected from the blazing sun.

Merchants of the better class displayed their goods—fancifully figured bright hand-loomed textiles such as no modern loom can duplicate—beneath white canvas awnings. Under similar sun shades the cobblers made their decorative tapir-hide *caites*, or men's sandals.

In a far corner of the plaza I found the picturesque pottery market under the still-flowering jacaranda trees. All sizes and shapes of clay pots, jars, and griddles were spread out in the spotted shade upon the sandy ground. Merchants continued to arrive, bent under tall leaning towers of earthenware vessels, cleverly roped onto their *cacaxtes*. I watched how carefully the buyers made their selections, peering into each jar and tapping it with their knuckles to see that it rang true.

I could not begin to enumerate half of the interesting things I saw. There were the handsome black woolen blankets of Chichicastenango; still handsomer ones in soft colors from San Francisco el Alto and San Cristóbal. Then there were small lean turkeys and a peculiar breed of chicken with featherless neck, much-prized by the Indians, lying in tethered groups; piles of gray ashes for the clay censers of the devout, and heaps of rose petals and cone-shaped bunches of candles tied together by their wicks for offerings in the church, while displayed on rush *petates* were all sorts of cheap and gaudy imported trinkets, and native toy bowls and pitchers and clay whistles in the form of birds and animals.

Having completed the circuit of the plaza, I passed through an archway leading to the segregated animal market. Maxeños raise pigs, so there were pigs galore. The air was rent by the protesting squeals of little pigs that were being torn by buyers from their mother's teats. Among the pigs were scattered many sheep—some white, some black—a few four-horned rams, and several small mules. Brays and bleats punctuated the more or less constant grunting and squealing.

On either side of the entrance, sheltered by tiled sheds, were kitchens where huge stew pots were kept simmering over charcoal fires. The combined odors of kitchen and market were past description.

Hungry *sopilotes* perched about on the rooftops impatiently

awaiting the time to begin their scavenger activities, for these birds clean up the remains when the market is over.

Eager to record my first impressions, I hurried back to the plaza and began to sketch.

About me swirled the life of the market. All was movement, color, and strangeness. The air reeked with human and animal odors, combined with the acrid fumes of incense. In the cerulean sky, flecked with white clouds, shone the tropical sun, drenching the scene with glamorous light.



Men trotted nimbly by with their precisely loaded *cacaxtes*. Women passed to and fro carrying babies and bundles and often dragging a string of unruly squealing piglets in their wake. Skinny and abject curs snooped about, nose to the ground, fighting among each other over scraps of refuse.

And yet the market was strangely quiet. The Indians never raise their soft voices nor bark their wares. Bargaining is one of their joys, but they do not engage in vociferous arguments. They have poker faces and they use poker tactics.

I watched a woman buy a chicken. Both parties to the transac-



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tion seemed utterly disinterested. Silence and waiting were part of the game.

Indians are not pecuniary. They do not understand profit. They will sell a chicken for eleven cents after having fed it a dollar's worth of corn. Not having paid for the egg from which the chicken was hatched nor the corn upon which it was fattened nor learned to place a value upon their own time and effort, they are satisfied with a sale that would seem to make them poorer instead of richer. But as every buyer is usually a seller, business is transacted with a minimum of cash. If the commodity exchange is fair, neither party loses.

Money is not important to the Indians, because they have economic security. They come to market to buy and to sell, it is true, but they also come to exchange news and gossip, to look at the colors and the goods, to worship in the church, and to mingle with their kind. That is life to lonely mountain dwellers.

I have tried to buy from Indians on the road but they do not want to sell. The saving of steps and the assurance of disposing of their goods means less to them than the excitement of the market place. There is also an ancient superstition that it is unlucky to sell en route to market.

Father Duran, an early priest, said that if an Indian woman were asked, "Which will you choose, to go straight to heaven or to go to the market?" she would say, "Let me first see the market."

I saw many strange costumes sprinkled throughout this medieval fair, but an overwhelming majority of the Indians wore the tribal dress of Chichicastenango.

Of patent Spanish derivation are the dashing black wool jackets and knee breeches of the men, but the embroidery and the queer breeches flaps called *orejas*, or ears, are pure Indian touches. A *tzut*, or tasseled square of red cloth with the Hapsburg double eagle woven in varied colors in the central field, is tied about the head and lends great dignity to the costume. If the jacket has a sun design on front, it indicates that the wearer is high caste. Other signs of distinction are the embroidery on the brilliant red sash and the quality of the *caites*.

Almost the only Guatemalan Indian women who wear short skirts are those of Chichicastenango and they can least afford

to do so, as their figures are usually dumpy and their legs seldom worth showing. But from a standpoint of color and design, their costume is one of the richest in the land. The predominant color of the kimono-sleeved *guipil* is either red or purple on a white or brown ground, and the brilliant color is set off perfectly by the striped indigo skirt. The *faja*, or belt, while narrow, is usually embroidered in bright colors, and the *tzut* is figured with fanciful dolls and animals. This latter article is simply folded once or twice and placed on the head. How it stays there, especially in the wind, is a mystery.

An Indian woman's most prized possession is her *chachal*, or necklace. It is usually an heirloom and it is the last thing she will willingly part with. Old *chachales* are curious affairs, being composed of colored stone beads heavily interlarded with pieces of eight, silver rings, and one or more silver crucifixes. The number of *chachales* entwined around a woman's throat indicates the wealth of her husband.

In Chichicastenango it is the modern fashion to bury these wonderful heirlooms under strings of silvered glass Christmas tree beads, a fashion that sounds fantastic but is actually highly decorative. These beads were priced at a dollar a string.

The Maxeños have a soft smile but hard eyes; an aloof, if not hostile, manner.

When I completed my sketch, I went inside the church, and here I beheld one of the strangest and most colorful sights in the world.

The whole center aisle was carpeted by red and white rose petals and was ablaze with candles standing in their own wax. Men were on their knees all the way to the altar. Their heads were respectfully uncovered, their *tzutes* being thrown back upon their shoulders, and their devout and serious bronzed faces were dramatically lit by the flickering candle flames. Strangest of all, these strong, silent men had found their voices and were volubly addressing their God in Quiché, accompanying their words with histrionic gestures.

Religion, it seemed, was man's affair. The women squatted passively behind their lords, nursing their babies or simply staring into vacancy with their mild, unspeaking eyes, their hands folded listlessly in their laps.

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The light from a thousand candles cast a warm glow upon the ancient rafters of the nave and upon the glittering images of the saints along the walls and the time-darkened oil paintings. Every saint had an offering of candles from its devotees.

I saw an Indian with a pregnant wife asking the blessing of his patron saint upon his future offspring.

Later I saw Indians burning incense to an ancient idol on a hill beyond the town.



The prayer-maker offered candles and rose petals to the idol as he had done to the saints in the church. He knelt over a smoking fire of copal and fumigated himself with his clay censer as he had done before entering the house of Christ. Now he stood facing the carved stone idol talking informally to it, as if it were a microphone by means of which he could hold a fireside chat with the spirits of his ancestors which still inhabit the hills.

I began to understand why the Indians had been so readily persuaded to Catholicism; the saints were so many beautiful new images to bow down to. The Indians saw no difference between

them and their own idols. They were more than ever convinced by the Spanish religious paintings and statues, in many of which the saints are always represented with certain animals, for the Indians believe that every man has his familiar spirit in the animal world. They call this animal spirit *nahual*, and they believe that their own destiny is inextricably linked with that of the beast, and vice versa.

Saints and idols, idols and saints. Who shall say where the one ends and the other begins?

In the evening all the guests of the Mayan Inn assembled in the lounge and bar. Fires crackled in the stone fireplaces and their warmth was very appealing, as Chichicastenango is seven thousand feet above the jungle heat, and the moment the tropical sun sets, the thin air loses its warmth and takes on a polar chill.

The beautiful carved paneling of the bar came from a church in Antigua. In fact, all of the woodwork in the Mayan Inn was rescued from colonial houses and churches that were falling into decay, some of the finest pieces having been literally snatched from under the fall of the ax. Everything in the Inn is authentic; that is its charm.

Meeting the Lynches, Helen and Bill, whose guest I had been at a cocktail party at their home in the capital, I joined them at the churchly bar.

After dinner Helen suggested that we have a look at the *zarabandas*, and we went out into the plaza, now dark and deserted in striking contrast to the crowded day-time scene. Like the Arabs, the Indians had folded their *tiendas* and silently stolen away. The pale churches were ghostly shapes against the velvety night. The tinkle of a marimba—the first I had heard, though I had been in the country two weeks—issued from the lighted doorway of a cantina down the street, and we walked toward this beacon of gaiety, Helen teetering on high heels not meant for rough cobbles. A group of Indian lookers-on before the barred window of the cantina parted to make way for us.

Within was a strange spectacle. Along one wall was a marimba with gourd sounding boxes played by two Indians. Half the notes were flatted, but it didn't matter; it had rhythm. A third musician with his face bound up with a bandana, accompanied

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the marimba on a cornet. At first I thought the bandana was to keep his tired jaw from falling off, but it seemed that it was worn to conceal a birthmark.

Men danced staidly with men, keeping time to the music with a sort of jiggety one-step. A few solo dancers of both sexes, inspired by the genius of the dance and too much white-eye, invented mad movements of their own. A pie-eyed woman with a tiny babe completely swathed in the *reboso* on her back, executed such fantastic gyrations that we momentarily expected her to commit infanticide. Finally we grew so nervous watching her that we went on to other *zarabandas*.

There were five, all much alike. The curious thing was the apparent lack of gaiety. From the sodden mask-like faces of the dancers it was impossible to say whether they were enjoying themselves or not. Our presence was never welcome, sometimes resented. Before long we returned to the Inn.



## VII

To Market—

To Market . . .

WITH THE Sunday market in session I had scarcely been able to see the town for the people. But the flood of primitive life and color had receded overnight. On Monday morning I found the plaza tranquil and almost devoid of movement.

Indian communities live from the soil, the villages serving chiefly as market centers for a rural population. The thousands of marketers had gone back to their milpas and home looms.

I could now enjoy, undistracted by scenes of human interest, the picturesque beauty of this mountain village with its air half-Indian and half-Spanish.

The charm of Chicicastenango is in its white churches, with their high steps, graceful proportions, and towers full of bells, which face each other across the sunny and colorful plaza. These churches do not stand idle between services, for the Indians do not live by the clock or the calendar. They come to the churches every day and at all hours of the day or night, to kneel upon the steps and to burn their candles and *pom*.

Adjoining the main church is the old Dominican convent, wherein one hundred years ago was found the Quiché bible known as the *Popul Vuh*. To the right of the entrance is a small disused oratory, which on market days is converted into a barber shop.

Seating myself on a stone bench under the eucalyptus trees, I made a water color sketch of the plaza and church. A couple of portable canvas *tiendas* had been set up beneath the trees, while out under the blazing sun six women kneeled in the dust offering a few over-ripe bananas and small piles of black beans and coffee for sale to a non-existent public. One woman passed the time picking *piojos* (lice) from her small daughter's hair. These she cracked with her teeth and did not always spit out afterward. Another woman employed herself spinning cotton with a hand-spindle as her great-grandmother spun cotton. The spindle was simply a stick tipped with a whorl, which rested in a small clay bowl, the spinner twirling it with one hand while feeding the raw cotton with the other.

Now and then single Indians or small family groups went to the church, always kneeling reverently at the portal and asking God's permission before entering.

But peaceful and idyllic as the scene appeared I did not paint long in peace.

Many of the Indians who had been drinking in the cantinas the night before had roused from the stupefying effects of their debauch and were taking their uncertain way homeward. All had gaudy *gomas*, or hangovers, and their feigned docility had left them. Three fellows with bloodshot eyes and unsteady feet, stamped loudly in passing. Others stopped and made obnoxious comments. A man whose breath you could cut with a machete swayed over my shoulder filling my ear with thick-tongued gibberish, and was about to put his hands on my painting when his woman dragged him away.

Seven little boys left off kicking a football to join the fun. They were worse than their elders. A young savage with stiff, upstanding hair—an *asustado*, or frightened one, as they are called—was the most brazen of all. What he did the others aped. When he asked for *pisto* (small change) all clamored for *pisto*. When he pawed through my studio box, six other brown fists did the same. I told them to go away. I threatened. But it did no good. I was bluffing, and they knew it. Then I gave the *asustado* a small bribe to decamp with his gang. It was the worst thing I could have done. Every brat among them wanted *pisto* and the *asustado* merely stood apart and grinned.

I am helpless with unruly children. These had the best of me on this and every other occasion until the novelty wore off and they left me alone.

Except for the plaza there is hardly a level foot of ground in Chichicastenango. The streets would be perfect for tobogganing, if they were covered with snow instead of uneven cobbles. Some of them run between high perpendicular embankments, into which steep steps have been cut to reach the houses perched on top.

All the houses are built of adobe brick and whitewashed or plastered. They are one story high, roofed with red tile, and devoid of windows and chimneys. Many are grouped in compounds.

The dim interiors are meagerly furnished: a three-stone fireplace in the middle of the hard earth floor, a few clay pots and water jars, gourds, a stone mortar, a clay griddle, and some rush sleeping mats. Smoke from the fire finds its way out through the open eaves, blackening the unceiled rafters with feathery soot.

Every house has a rear portico, where corn and leeks are hung to dry and where there are wooden cages imprisoning native song birds.

The work-a-day life of the village goes on behind the compound walls and in the back patios. It should be sordid, but the birds, fowls, pigs, flowers, babies, and richly dressed women, patting *tortillas*, washing and weaving, make it gay. Nothing is more fascinating than glimpses of these hidden courtyards, saturated with sunshine and lurid with color.

The Indians of Guatemala live in a medieval handicraft economy. Villages, more than men, have their traditional occupations. Some catch fish or crabs, others raise leeks, still others weave blankets, baskets, or *petates*. In this way they supply all their own needs, each village sending its special produce to the regional markets for mutual exchange.

Industrious and self-sufficient, not reliant on foreign markets, never knowing the pinch of famine and indifferent to gadgets, the aborigines are an independent and wantless people. All they ask is to be left alone.

Towns the size of Chichicastenango have a white *intendente*



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and parish priest, but the Indians also have their own mayor and religious sodalities. Tribal affairs are in their own hands.

Padre Ildefonso Rossbach has long been the parish priest of Chichicastenango.

Calling at the old convent on the second night of my arrival, I found the famous *presbitero* in his study surrounded by the town's leading citizens.

He was sitting in a low rocker, a patriarchal figure with his black satin skull cap, fringe of silvery hair, and priestly dress. An unshaded electric bulb, dangling from the center of the high ceiling pitilessly etched the lines of age in his face and forced the pallor of his cheeks and hands. I judged him to be seventy, but when he began to talk, his vigor and animation made him seem much nearer his prime. As a protection against the chill of the room, which was unheated and carpeted only by fragrant pine needles, he was wrapped to the middle in a black wool Chichicastenango blanket.

With the most charming manner in the world he made me sit beside him, and I soon saw that this parish priest, who has given the past thirty years of his life to work among the Indians of Guatemala, was far better posted on world affairs and American politics than myself. His wide correspondence, the growing volume of tourists, and the radio have nullified his former isolation.

When the radio was installed, however, it nearly cost him the confidence of his Indian parishioners, who thought he was communicating with evil spirits by means of the mysterious talking box.

Upon my telling him that I had been in Quiriguá and that Dr. MacPhail was hoping to see him there soon, Padre Rossbach said that he needed to go but could not abandon his duties. He waved a hand in the direction of his flat-top desk by the window, upon which letters were stacked in a tottering heap.

"I have not even answered the doctor's last letter," he said. "As a correspondent, I am like Mark Twain. I put off answering letters for six months. By that time it is amazing how few need to be answered."

I wanted to talk about the Indians' religion. So I said I had

seen the Indians praying audibly over their rose petals and candles in the church on Sunday, and that I thought such simple faith was wonderful.

"Yes, isn't it wonderful?" said the padre. "But, would you believe it? some tourists claim to be shocked because the Indians mingle their own rites with those of the church. They throw up their hands and ask, Do you call this Christianity?"

The padre accompanied his words with lively grimaces and gestures; his whole body talked.

"You have seen the idol on the hill?" he continued. "Then you saw the crosses beside it. Always the two together. That is the point. If the Indians do not forget their idols when they worship in the church, neither do they forget the cross when they worship their idols."

He took a small tin of snuff from his pocket and put a pinch in either nostril.

"Do you mind if I snuff?" he asked with a twinkle in his blue Germanic eyes. "It is one of my many vices. Now, where were we? Oh, about the Indians—how can you take from them what they understand and give them a metaphysical idea they are incapable of grasping? Tsh! It's impossible. We must begin with the children to do that. The elders live by *costumbre*.

"I have a catechism class for one hundred Indian boys after school lets out. But I do not give them the usual catechism. I teach them that there is one God and that He is everywhere, otherwise He would not be God, but human. I tell them God sees everything. He sees them when they take a pencil that doesn't belong to them and also when they steal pennies from their mother's cashbox when she leaves them in charge of her *tienda*.

"I teach them to clean their fingernails, for personal hygiene is the Indians' greatest need, if they are to rise above their present level. There will be time enough to teach them Christian doctrine after they have experienced the benefits of our civilization.

"I want the Indians to progress," he concluded earnestly, "but I want them to remain Indians, and not look up to the ladinos and adopt their foolish dress in exchange for their own traditional costumes. I want them to wear a *tzut* and not a hat, and

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to sleep on a bed and not on the ground, which is the cause of so much sickness and the high infant mortality. In short, I want the Indians to adhere to their costumes and traditions, but to become cleanly, self-respecting, and justly proud of their race."

The Indians bring the padre his food, stovewood, and the pine needles to carpet his floors, and they also bring him valuable pieces of Mayan jade, obsidian, and gold, so that over the years he has built up a magnificent collection. A few days later he showed me some of his most prized treasures, including a head modeled in cement over an actual human skull. A description of this method of preserving the heads of Mayan rulers is to be found in the *Popul Vuh*, but the example in the padre's collection is the only one that has come to light.

Dear to the padre's heart is his game of chess. I asked permission to sketch him playing with one of his cronies.

All the town's elite were in the room—*intendente*, *comandante*, poet, labor agent, miller, and musician—and they took a lively interest in the sketch, exclaiming when I finished, "*Es él!*" "Yes, it's this old fellow," nodded the padre.

Promptly at nine-thirty, as if at a given signal, everyone rose and bade Padre Rossbach *buenas noches*. It was his hour for retiring.

The good padre saw me to the convent door. From the ceiling of the corridor down which we passed hung strips of colored crepe paper which rustled like the sighing of the wind through pine boughs. It was a white tropical night. Every detail of the old Dominican garden was as clear as if seen by day. Starlight danced upon the softly splashing waters of the ancient carved-stone fountain in the center of the vine-arched walk, and brilliance was reflected from the white walls of the church upon the grinning face of a stone idol in a corner of the garden. On a deep shelving abutment of the dark *zaguán* the black shapes of Indian sacristans muffled in their blankets stirred and whispered. Padre Rossbach unbolted the door and I passed out into the tranquil, starlit plaza.

When Sunday came again, I rose with the dawn and posted myself on top of the convent wall to sketch the Indians coming to market.



Dawn brings Indians down  
to the market in Chichicastenango

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I was much beforehand. The bright morning and I had caught the town still napping. Cool blue shadow and nothing more filled the long street, slung like a hammock between two hills. At the bottom of the slope a street cut through at right angles. An immense datura hung its great white bells and vivid green foliage over the wall of the near right hand corner, while across the street, a black rectangle in the staring whiteness, was the doorway of a cantina, where later in the day a marimba would entice the Indians to spend their market money for white-eye. As the Indians cannot read, no signs or placards deface the virgin lintels of the cantinas and *tiendas*.

The first stir of life was the smoke curling from the eaves of the houses and seeping through the tiles, and the soft pat-pat of women's hands shaping the masa into *tortillas*.

Before long a *bubonero* appeared around the corner by the datura. For a moment he was caught in a slice of sunlight and then he turned up the still-shadowed street. He wore the black wool costume of Chichicastenango with short knee breeches, exposing his muscular brown calves, but had abandoned the *tzut* for a white cornucopia-crowned sombrero decorated with bright colors. As he came nearer, I noticed that as a pad for the *cacaxte* on his back he used a black wool blanket with a long fringe that hung nearly to his knees. Doubtless he had spent the night on the road, for he carried a folded *petate*, blanket, *candil*, coffee pot, gourd of *atole*, and a rolled palm-leaf rain cape, called a *suycal*, all tied to the *cacaxte*. What sort of wares the *cacaxte* contained I could not see, for it was tightly covered, but I could guess them to be weighty because he had passed his staff beneath the load so as to lift it with his arms and relieve the pressure of the tumpline upon his forehead. As he passed beneath me, his soft-soled sandals made scarcely any sound. He could not have looked up had he wanted to, his head being held rigid by the tumpline.

Soon other figures appeared, men, women, and children—the latter dressed exactly like their parents, and like them, bearing burdens commensurate with their strength. The women carried great baskets upon their heads and bulky bundles in their hands, while their backs usually bulged with babies. A woman, who had no use for shoes herself, led on strings a litter of little pigs,

whose tender feet were protected\* from the ash-hardened earth and rough stones by tiny leather boots.

Rapidly, now, the throng increased. Silently they passed, with impassive, down-turned faces. The blazing light from the ascending sun filled the street—flashed from silvery *chachales* about the yokes of the fire-red *guipiles* of the Maxeñas.

Below me rolled a scarlet sea of *tzutes* and floating islands of pottery, miniature furniture, and baled fodder.

Now and then came groups of Indians from Sololá, the women wearing blouses striped in brilliant primary colors, and wide red and yellow sashes. And occasionally there appeared long-skirted women from Totonicapán, blue and green predominating in their costumes, the younger ones strikingly pretty and possessed of a sense of style and coquetry that set them apart from the drudging Sololtecas and Maxeñas. They had feminine ways of draping their long *rebosos* and of doing their hair with gay figured *cintas*, from the ends of which dangled oriental-looking, peacock-hued pompons.

It was a flood of vibrating, singing color, straight down from the Mayas. The conquistadores could not have been beauty-blind to have let this rainbow through.

The Indians still regard the camera with distrust. Once a moving picture outfit attempted to photograph a fiesta in Chichicastenango, but the Indians slipped off to the hills. And during my stay, a photographer for an American magazine, who tried to photograph worshipers on the steps of the church from the roof of an adjacent building, was also bilked by the wary Indians, who boycotted the church. The Indians mockingly nicknamed him *el Sopilote*.

During this deadlock between camera and custom, the Indians worshiped in the little Calvario church across the plaza, and taking advantage of the situation, I made a water color from the other end of the roof. The Calvario, which no longer has the Stations of the Cross, is dedicated to the dead by the Indians who resent its being entered by the whites.

In time the Indians got used to seeing me at work. Perhaps because they are all artisans and saw that I made pictures with my hands and a few sticks, many of them became interested, and

## VIII

### Loom of Life

ONE DAY I went to a rancho on the outskirts of the village to sketch an Indian woman at her weaving. Her name was Tomasa. (Maxeños do not trouble to find original names for their offspring; all seem to be named after the patron saint.) She was young and had good Indian features, and came as near to being pretty as any of her race, which is not noted for beauty. When she began to weave, however, she seemed to acquire a certain beauty that I had not noticed before.

She sat on her heels on the bare earth floor of the *corredor*. Her loom was incredibly simple, consisting of only two end-sticks to which the warp threads were fastened. One end-stick was attached to a column, and the other to a tumpline passed around her hips. She used a broad batten of some hard dark wood to beat back the woof threads, and among several smaller sticks was one of bamboo, with some tiny pebbles placed in its hollow center to make a companionable tinkling sound as she worked.

Fearing that she would become self-conscious if I asked her to hold a pose, I permitted her to go on with her weaving while I painted. This gave me a chance to study her characteristic movements, and as they were always repeated as rhythmically as in a dance, I was able to check the position I selected time

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and again. She was weaving the center part of a *guipil*, and already half of it was upon the loom. I admired the colors and the workmanship and asked if she would sell it to me when she had finished, but she shook her head negatively.

"But why won't you sell it?"

"Because, *señor*, it is for myself."

A good and sufficient reason, because when Tomasa weaves for herself she uses the very best color-fast materials she can buy, but when she weaves for the *tienda* she is not so particular.

The design of the Chichicastenango *guipil* is very interesting. The collar with its radiating darts symbolizes the sun, while the four black circles with a silver coin in the center of each, represent the moon revolving around the sun. In the squares in front and back are highly conventionalized double eagles supposedly copied from the Hapsburg coat of arms, although some say the bird which faces in two directions is an even more ancient Indian symbol. The colors and designs differ according to the caste of the wearer. In Chichicastenango the lines between the castes are tightly drawn. A high-class Quiché woman wears a white *guipil* with red double eagles, while her cacique-descended husband wears on the front of his coat a large sun with a silver coin in the center, and his *tzut* and *faja* are embroidered with the double eagle.

But Tomasa did not belong to the first or even the second, or merchant, class. Her husband, Macario, is not a descendant of a cacique, nor yet of a craftsman or trader; he is a simple farmer like her own father. When Tomasa was very young she learned to carry jars of water on her head from the *pila*, and to grind the *maíz* on its ancient mortar of stone. And before she was fourteen, she had learned to weave the tribal symbols into her mother's *guipil*; for every girl must learn to weave before she marries.

Both she and Macario had listened from infancy to tales of the *Duende*, the *Sisemite*, the *Cadeja*, and the *Sombrerón*. They believed implicitly in these imaginary beings. They are sure that the *Duende* can change you into any form he pleases; that the *Sisemite* steals unbaptized children; that when the dog cowers without apparent reason, it is a sign that the *Cadeja* is somewhere near; and that the *Sombrerón* wears a huge green hat, from



which he gets his name (Big Hât). They believe too, that the lightning is a big fish, and the thunder a grumpy old man, and that every mountain is alive and has its own character.

Indian parents do not consider it necessary for their daughters to have the rudimentary education given the boys, or even to learn to speak Spanish. Tomasa knew a few Spanish words, probably picked up in the market, but nearly always when I spoke to her, looked to Macario for an interpretation. Macario had been to the village school for boys kept by the now famous Diego, and had learned Spanish. He could even write after a fashion, by taking much pains and sticking his tongue out of a corner of his mouth, and prided himself on this accomplishment. Among his own people, however, Macario spoke only Quiché, and the teachings of Diego were slowly slipping out of his mind from want of use.



Macario and Tomasa have strange religious beliefs, which are a picturesque mixture of Catholicism and paganism. It is hard to tell just what is their conception of God. They have been

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taught by Padre Rossbach that God is omnipresent and omniscient. They have accepted this belief without giving up the faith of their forefathers, and so they worship the Deity in the same way they do their own ancient idols. Macario burns *pom* on an altar at the foot of the church steps. In one hand he swings a crude clay censer, and before he enters the church he kneels and supplicates God's permission. Tomasa kneels silently at his side and follows him inside. She is dressed in an immaculate *guipil* and wears about her neck as many strands of silvery glass beads as Macario can afford to give her. Wrapped in her *servilleta* are rose leaves and candles. Before they enter the church, Macario respectfully takes the *tzut* off his head and places it shawl-wise across his shoulders. Once inside, they do not go directly to the altar, but approach the holy of holies by degrees, first pausing just within the entrance. Tomasa sits upon her heels while Macario drops upon one knee. He takes a few candles from the *servilleta*, lights them, and places them in a row on the floor, fixing them upright in a few drops of melted tallow. Then he sprinkles some red rose petals, symbols of blood sacrifice, in the path of the candles and having made these offerings, audibly addresses God. With his gaze fixed upon the candle flames as if he saw within them a holy vision, he unburdens his soul of his injuries and desires. Thus, step by step, the young Mayan couple solemnly make their way up the church aisle to the very steps of the altar. There are many other worshipers, and the sum of their offerings creates a carpet of rose petals bordered by dancing candle flames the whole length of the great nave.

Macario and Tomasa then leave the church and take a path leading from the village to the top of the hill known as the Pascual Abaj, where there is an ancient stone idol. Here Macario burns the remainder of his *pom* and candles and scatters the last of his rose petals before the smoke-blackened image, and repeats his prayers to the spirits of the hills.

We who call ourselves Christians and consider ourselves superior civilized beings are wont to smile at the childish duality of the Indian's faith. We are amused at his clinging to his old superstitions while accepting God. But do we ever consider the folly of those who worship an all-powerful Deity and at the same time believe that their destinies are guided by astrology,

numerology, palmistry, and the position of tea leaves in a china cup?

For some time before Tomasa's marriage, gifts of firewood, corn, live chickens, and other foods and valuables, and a huge olla of *aguardiente* were left before her door by the father of Macario. The acceptance of these presents signified consent, and Macario's godmother set up her loom to weave the bridal *guipil*. When the time came for Macario to take his place in Tomasa's family, a great feast was prepared, to which were invited all the relatives and friends of both families. Since the law requires that a civil marriage must precede a religious wedding, the Indians, for lack of money, dispense with both and are married by their own *brujos* or elders. Four witnesses were present to take account of the wedding gifts; for if Tomasa proved barren or lazy, it would be Macario's right to return her to her parents, in which case the witnesses would be called in to aid in the divorce settlement. Before the feast, the officiating elder delivered a solemn homily to the young couple, exhorting them with Voltairian wisdom, to cleave to the soil as their greatest possession and to cultivate their milpa. At last the feast came, and while all the guests were eating and drinking heavily, Tomasa and Macario slipped off to consummate their marriage. The marks of a beating upon Tomasa's happy face the next morning gave proof of Macario's love.

Macario knows no tender words to express his passion. He looks upon any demonstration of affection as unmanly. But so long as he exhibits jealousy and chastises her regularly, Tomasa knows that she is truly beloved.

The home of Macario and Tomasa is a simple, one-room, tile-roofed rancho, the walls of which are made of adobe covered outside with white plaster. In the middle of the dirt floor is a rude fireplace of three stones, and as there is no chimney the smoke finds its way out through the open spaces under the eaves. Of course, a good deal of smoke gets in the eyes of everyone present, but Indians do not seem to mind that, any more than they mind the odor of the pigs. I asked Macario how he stood this awful smell.

"The *coche* may not smell good now," he said; "but he'll smell good when he's cooking."

The kitchenware consists of a few pots, water jars, a stone mortar for grinding corn, and a clay griddle. Tomasa spends most of her time making *tortillas*. Every night she puts dried corn to soak in lime water, which softens the hard skin. Early the next morning, long before Macario bestirs himself, Tomasa is busy grinding the corn with a stone rolling pin. She squats on her heels and grinds it over and over again until it becomes a very fine paste called masa, which she rolls into little balls. She pats each ball between the palms of her hands until it becomes a thin round cake ready for baking. The griddle has been placed on the stones over the fire and its surface covered with lime to prevent the masa from sticking. When the *tortillas* are ready, Macario gets up. If the morning is cold, Tomasa prepares a hot gruel made of masa called posole, to drink with the *tortillas*.

While Tomasa is occupied with her weaving and other household duties, Macario tills his milpa. He farms in the same primitive way his fathers did—making his milpa by burning over a clearing in the woods. The ashes fertilize the soil, which he cultivates with a great clumsy hoe. He plants by dropping the kernels of corn in holes made by a dibble stick and covers them over with a movement of his foot as he goes along. Macario did his planting in April before the first rains. The dampness and warmth make the weeds as well as the corn sprout at a frantic rate, and he has his hands full keeping the milpa clean. After the harvest he will let nature reclaim the land and do nothing more about it until next March, when he will burn it over and plant it again. In that month a heavy pall of smoke from the milpa fires covers the country, making it hard for aviators to find the landing fields.

In September when the coffee harvest starts, Macario and Tomasa will take their pigs and chickens, whistle to the dogs, and walk out of their rancho and down to a *finca* many miles away on the south slope of volcano Atitlán, four thousand feet below Chichicastenango, where they will work picking coffee berries until November or December. Macario is required by law to work a certain part of each year for the good of agriculture. In May, 1934, President Ubico pardoned all the Indians' debts which had been contracted under the old system of advancing cash to the *mozos* and thus obligating them to work to pay it

back. The president allowed the *finqueros* two years to collect what they could, and about 50 per cent of all debts were paid back. But though the Indians have been freed of debt and their lands, taken away by mortgage foreclosures, returned to them, they are expected to supply voluntary labor to pick the coffee crop, which represents the chief wealth of the country.

In a tin box carried in the close-mesh sisal *mextate* slung on his shoulder Macario keeps a *libretto* in which are checked the number of tasks he has performed. As he owns his milpa, he need do only the minimum of one hundred tasks, instead of one hundred and fifty, during the year. But he must complete this allotment or be liable to arrest for vagrancy and compelled to work one month for the government and fifteen days for his municipality.

The *finca* bell is tolled at 5 a. m. and all the *mozos* tumble out for *tortillas*. Their women were up an hour before, their work being made slightly easier for them on the *finca* by the power mill where they can take their lime-soaked corn to be ground.

The *mozos* are divided into sections under a *caporal*, who takes orders from the *mayordomo*, who receives orders from the *administrador*, who is responsible to the *patrón*. Macario, like all the other coffee pickers, has a big basket strapped around his waist into which he puts the ripe red berries as he picks them. By working hard, he is able to fill a sack containing five to six *arrobas* (125 to 150 lbs.) for which he gets up to twenty cents. This does not seem like very high pay, but Macario receives many free benefits that must be taken into consideration. The *finca* provides him with a rancho and gives him a daily ration of corn, lime, and plátanos, and sometimes panela or cane sugar. In addition, the *finca* has a free dispensary for treating the *mozos* and their families.

When all this is totaled up, Macario has little to complain of as to remuneration. His chief objection to going to work on the coffee plantations is the risk of contracting malaria or other infection. The Indians on the *fincas* in the region where Macario goes used to run the risk of losing their sight from the bite of the filaria, or blinding fly. This insect deposits its eggs in the back of the head, and when the nits hatch, they work through

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the brain to the eyes, causing blindness. At first, cases were treated by cutting out the egg cyst as soon as it developed, but recently it was found that an injection of hexylresorcinol causes the swelling to disappear in three days. The *finqueros* are constantly trying to reduce sickness among the *mozos*, but in spite of all their efforts a small percentage of those who come down from the highlands never return, and many go back with malaria and die from lack of proper treatment.

One of Macario's relatives, on returning to Chichicastenango from the last harvest, fell ill of the dread disease, and in spite of the quinine sent to him by Padre Rossbach, who is able to buy medical supplies for the Indians through the aid of friends in the United States, the man died. Macario and Tomasa attended the *velorio* or wake. All the family and friends of the deceased were present. The coffin was placed in the center of the room with lighted candles around it, and as each person entered, he said a prayer for the departed. A feast had been prepared and while the guests ate, drank, and made merry, the musicians played the wild tuneless music of the *chirimia* accompanied by the lugubrious beating of the drum.

On the following afternoon the funeral took place. The coffin, covered by a dark blue mantle with a red cross in the center, was first taken to the church. In advance of the procession walked two boys, one carrying a cross and the other a bell, very much like an ordinary cowbell, which he kept jangling. Next came three members of the *cofradia*, or religious sodality, dressed in solemn black tunics and bearing in their hands long silver maces. Then came the coffin, carried on the shoulders of Macario and three other men, followed by a man bearing a low table on his head, another with a handful of rockets, then by the wailing widow and the other mourners.

At every street corner the procession halted, and the man carrying the table placed it under the coffin, which was set down upon it. The three *cofrades* turned toward the deceased and the one in the center murmured a ritual and several times made the sign of the cross. On reaching the church, the same ceremony was repeated at the foot of the steps. There, the man with the rockets went part way up the steps and fired one off. The coffin was then carried to the top steps and set down before the door

of the church, and Padre Rossbach emerged from the dark shadows in a black robe richly embroidered in gold, and pronounced a Latin litany in an unearthly singsong while sprinkling the coffin with holy water.

This same service was repeated four more times in a slow progress toward the altar, where the Padre pronounced a final benediction, and the procession filed back out of the church. When the pall-bearers had carried the coffin to the foot of the church steps, they ran around and around in a circle with it so as to confuse the spirit of the dead man and prevent its finding its way back to earth. Then they hurried off to the cemetery, the boy with the bell jangling it loudly as he led the way. Another rocket was fired from the church steps to signal their departure. While the coffin was being lowered into the grave and covered over, the last and loudest rocket was shot into the air.

The widow went to live with Macario and Tomasa. I caught occasional glimpses of her as she passed to and fro within the dark rancho. Macario said she was making candles which she and Tomasa would take to the plaza on market day to sell.

Tomasa had agreed to pose for fifteen cents, but I gave her a quarter. She appeared very pleased, as well she might; for it was more than Macario could earn by a hard day's work.



## IX

### Over the Hills . . .

LATE IN MAY a young traveling salesman from the capital stopped overnight at the Inn on his way to the very places I now wanted to go — Totonicapán, Quezaltenango, Momostenango, San Marcos, and Huehuetenango, all the chief centers of the Indian high country. I offered to pay the gas if he would take me along, and he agreed. So early next morning we set out in his six-year-old Dodge roadster, to be gone one week. A week of scouting for me. Lencho, as he asked me to call him, was a tall, clean-looking German-Guatemalteco, who spoke little English.

We followed a roller-coaster road through wild mountains that are a part of the Continental Divide extending from Alaska to the Straits of Magellan. At times we looked down from a height of eleven thousand feet upon an endless sweep of pine tops undulating away toward the horizon. In the depths of these forests Guatemala's bird of paradise, the quetzal, finds the solitude its timid soul demands. It refuses to live in captivity, and so has become the national symbol of liberty.

Totonicapán, which we reached toward six in the evening, stands in the biting cold at an elevation of around eight thousand feet. Citified and possessing many modern buildings of no merit, it lacks the charm of colonial-Indian towns, but it is an impor-



tant craft center. Totonicapán furniture, skirts, and headribbons are sold in every market.

When Eve finished the first skirt in history and observed the effect of clothes upon Adam, undoubtedly she next put a flower in her hair. And Indian women prove they are true daughters of Eve by bedecking their hair with rainbow-hued *cintas*.

The most exquisite *cintas* are woven in Totonicapán. They are an inch and a half wide and seven feet long, the very finest being made of silk, woven in narrow figured bands of brilliant color. Attached to the ends are dazzling cascades of silk pompons.

Oddly enough, these *cintas* are woven by men. I watched a weaver at work in his windowless rancho, lit only by a stub of tallow candle stuck in its own grease on a corner of his primitive little foot-loom. The spools of colored thread were stuck on pegs on top of the frame, and the weaver knew to a hair how much of each color was needed for his designs. He battened the threads with his middle finger and worked with amazing speed. So expert was he that when he finished there were only a few bits of wasted thread left on the floor.

A great white moon had risen over the black mountains pocketing the town by the time Lencho had finished seeing his clients. But I was wrong in supposing that we were ready to go on to Quezaltenango, where he had told me we would spend the night. Lencho had a *señorita* girl friend. And so the moon was nearing her zenith before we left.

I shall never forget the beauty of that night, hardly less bright than day. The road tumbled down from the hills into a hushed and fragrant valley through which flowed the serene Samalá. The sky was white with stars. You never realize how many stars there are until you have visited a planetarium, and you never know how lovely they can be until you come to the tropics.

We entered a large town slumbering profoundly upon the banks of the river. As we threaded the narrow white-walled streets, there was not a sound save the rumble of our tires. Not a dog barked. Not a light gleamed. Every door was closed and bolted; the town was hermetically sealed against the dreaded nocturnal miasma.

Where the river severed the town it was spanned by a long

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stone bridge. On the opposite bank we saw a beautiful white church, massive yet graceful, its gleaming bare flanks contrasting with the rich ornamentation of the façade.

On our right the mountains rose precipitously to a tremendous height. Glancing up to where starry sky met lofty mountain I saw a castled shape of shining whiteness.

"Where are we?" I asked Lencho. "And what is that fairy castle up on the mountain?"

"This is San Cristóbal, the largest Indian town in Guatemala," he said. "And that up above must be the convent of San Francisco el Alto."

Saint Francis, the High. How well named!

The next town we came to seemed equally locked in sleep. But as we passed through the little plaza we were startled by a shrill whistle. Lencho stopped the car with screeching brakes and switched off the lights. A soldier emerged from the shadow of the *comandancia* and stepped up to the car. After asking us where we came from and where we were going, our names, etc., he thrust a black slate into Lencho's hands and told him to write down the answers he had just given orally. Since the law forbade him to turn on his lights, Lencho had to do the best he could in the pitchy dark. The blind scratching of the crayon set our teeth on edge.

This was the ladino village of Salcajá, which dyes for a living.

From here the road was wide and flat, except for the chuck holes, and bordered on either side by candelabra cactus, whose pale yellow flowers bloomed atop straight stems over twenty feet high.

At the end of an hour's driving we reached Quezaltenango.

This is perhaps the oldest city of importance in the country. When the Spaniards came it was a Quiché stronghold, second only to Utatlán. It was then known by the barbaric name of Xelajú, which the conquerors changed to Quezaltenango (place of the quetzal) because it was near here that they first saw the beautiful red and green bird that is nine-tenths tail feathers.

The city lies in an extremely large and fertile valley at the frigid altitude of eight thousand feet, and is walled in on the south and west by mighty volcanoes—Cerro Quemado, Siete Orejas, Santa Maria, and Zunil. More than once it has been



almost destroyed by terrible earthquakes. In these days its life blood is being drained by the booming growth of Guatemala City. It is now hardly more than the ghost of the robust city of the past. And it appeared ghostly and deserted as we drove through its tortuous, hilly streets in the silvery moonlight.

Lencho stopped the car before the closed double doors of the hotel *zaguán*. His loud knocking awoke street echoes and the Spanish proprietor. He came to let us in, dressed in nightcap

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and slippers, his nightshirt tucked hastily inside his trousers.

We drove into the *zaguán* and left the car there. In the big patio, where there were hundreds of plants growing in Standard Oil tins, several other cars were parked for the night.

Our host showed us to two adjoining rooms, both huge, with high ceilings, and furnished only with the bare necessities. Undressing quickly I threw myself wearily upon my bed—and was nearly knocked out. It was the type of bed called a *banco*, having only a thin excuse for a mattress laid upon flat boards, and a pillow of concrete. When I got through counting stars, I began counting sheep. I felt that I had just closed my eyes when they were brought open by a sound of knocking, and I saw Lencho standing fully dressed in the doorway silhouetted by the light from his room. He handed me a cup of lukewarm coffee he had got somehow and said that as soon as I dressed we would start for San Marcos, up near the Mexican border.

I saw that this was going to be a strenuous life, for I am a person who requires eight hours' sleep. But I dressed with alacrity, being ever avid of new sights, smells, and sounds; ever seeking a new thing, and loving new scenes and contact with strange peoples.

The road to San Marcos will someday be famous for its scenery, because it is destined to form a link of the Inter-American Highway. The scenery will always be beautiful and wild, but I shudder to think what will happen to the little Indian villages when the touring cars begin to whiz down from the north. It will be a sad change when the Indians are driven from their plazas to provide parking space for cars, the *pilas* replaced by filling stations, the houses transformed into tea shoppes and curio stores and made hideous with signs.

Some of the finest and most sophisticated weaving comes from the looms of San Marcos and its Siamese twin, San Pedro.

The women of San Pedro wear a yellow skirt of a peculiarly interesting hue obtained from bird lime, and theirs is the only costume I know of in which this color predominates. I later saw some of these women in the market plaza of San Juan Ostuncalco and their dress made a welcome change from the strong reds and blues of the other villages.

We spent the night in San Marcos, but were up at a lusty hour

next morning as we had a four-hour drive back to Quezaltenango.

Every day we visited different towns in the region—Cantel, San Cristóbal, Momostenango, and other places of great interest about which I will have more to tell in a later chapter.

Cantel is only a few miles from Quezaltenango, but in order to find our way there we took a boy to guide us. I had said that I wanted to see the Indians at their weaving, so his error in taking us to a cotton mill instead of to the Indian village was pardonable, for apparently all of the women and girls of Cantel village, situated on a mesa high above, work in it.

Mr. Whitehead, the English supervisor of weaving, kindly conducted me through the weaving rooms, explaining the machines, the patterns and the threading process, but interesting as it all was, my attention would stray to the weavers and their beautiful costumes woven on their primitive two-stick looms and far more fascinating than the product of any power loom. Nothing could be more strange—a cotton mill in which all the operatives seemed to be in fancy dress.

Upon leaving the mill, Lencho returned to Quezaltenango, while I scaled the abrupt and arduous ascent to the village. It was charming but almost depopulated, the men being on their milpas and the women in the mills, while only a few soldiers sat nursing their rifles on the porch of the *comandancia*. They stared at me as though I were an unaccountable apparition.

In looking for an interesting perspective of the village I kept climbing higher and higher above it, until even the great church with its too-ornate façade appeared to be a toy-sized edifice in a Lilliputian city.

As it was noon, I washed down a banana with a swig of water from my canteen by way of lunch, and began to paint. But the elements were against my finishing, for the south wind, which springs up in the afternoon, drove the rain before it and sent me slipping back down the now muddy trail to the floor of the valley, where I took shelter in a *tienda* and talked Spanish with the proprietor until Lencho returned.

That evening in the hotel bar Lencho and I got into a game of *chingona* with some townspeople. No longer blest by begin-

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ner's luck, I signed most of the *vales* for the highballs, of which we consumed so many that by dinner time we had ideas.

At dinner we were joined by a young Spanish friend of Lenchó's, named Benito. Our first idea was a bottle of wine, and that suggested that we do something with the night before us. The movies, which in Quezaltenango are no commonplace, seemed a good start, so we saw a delirious Hollywood Western in sound with ad-libbing Spanish titles.

From the movies we went to a cantina, where our ideas were freshly stimulated, not so much by a round of drinks as by the sound of a marimba orchestra next door. Benito asked the cantina keeper the reason for the festivities and was told that a wedding was being celebrated.

"A wedding, you say!" cried Benito. "And here we sit paying for our own drinks! *Vamonos!*"

And so we crashed the wedding party.

Had the hour been less advanced, we probably would not have got away with it, but the hour being what it was, we were engulfed in well-stimulated conviviality.

We found ourselves in a large, handsome patio filled with trees and flowers and a hundred or so wedding guests, whose correct evening dress made me conscious of my travel-bedraggled tan suit. The spacious rooms opening onto the galleries were brightly lighted and in turn lighted the patio with a soft glow. Although the furniture had been cleared from the center of the rooms for dancing, most of the couples seemed to prefer the semi-obscurity of the *corredors*. The music was supplied by two orchestras which spelled each other, each consisting of a marimba, bass viol, cornet, flute, and saxophone.

In the center of the patio was a glass pavilion where a punch bowl flowed. At much too frequent intervals I was invited to partake by men eager to parade their few English words. The drink had a new and strange flavor and a terrific wallop. I asked what were its ingredients.

"Olla and sherry," they said. *Olla* is *aguardiente* distilled in clay jugs, or ollas.

They wanted to know an American toast and I gave them

"Here's mud in your eye!" which they thought very funny, but which was not half so good as their own:

*amor y quetzales  
Y tiempo para gozarles.*

"Money, love and vim  
And time to enjoy 'em."

The next morning, accompanied by Benito, we drove over the mountains to Momostenango where we saw the *riscos* and the blanket market, and met Don Ernesto Lange.

My Spanish dictionary defines *risco*: crag, cliff, honey fritter. The *riscos* of Momostenango are craggy pinnacles of earth and stone carved by erosion from the adjacent cliffs. They are about thirty feet high and occupy an area the size of a small quarry. Compared to similar formations in Bryce Canyon, the *riscos* are well described as honey fritters.

There is nothing picayunish, however, about the Momostenango blanket market. Imagine the entire plaza and all the main thoroughfares of a large village solidly carpeted by striped, plaid, and figured blankets and you will form some idea of this amazing market scene.

These blankets are made of pure native wool and dyed in soft permanent colors: blue from the indigo plant, red from the cochineal bug, and purple extracted from sea clams. As proof that the colors are fast, the blankets are sold wet.

The finest ones are patterned with equestrian figures of the conquistadors, dolls, *pajaritos*, *animalitos*, and abstract designs. They are irresistibly good-looking. The highest asking price was thirty dollars, but most prices could be shaved ten or even fifteen dollars by hard bargaining.

After making a purchase, we went to call on Don Ernesto Lange at his *tienda* up the street from the church plaza. Don Ernesto came to the door dressed in a short indigo poncho and red beret, and his manner seemed to say, "I am somebody here; not simply a white man who has gone native. Make no mistake about it."

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And indeed he is somebody. He is a German who came among the Indians some twenty years ago, married a cacique's daughter, and is one of the few white men to be fully accepted into an Indian tribe.

We left Momostenango about noon and on arriving in San Cristóbal were invited by an uncle of Benito's who owns the principal general store in the town, to have lunch in his home. This uncle said that when I went back to Momostenango I should not miss seeing the public bath where men and women bathed together, and I made a mental note for future guidance.

After lunch I hung about the store watching the Indian women making their small purchases. They wore the Totoncapán skirt and *faja*, but used a white cotton blouse with ruffled sleeves and a scalloped collar embroidered with flowers in place of the usual woven *guipil*. One woman had her small son with her, a manly little fellow, who stared at me as though I might have been a church effigy come to life. As they were leaving the store, I gave the boy a two-cent piece. His mother laughed and said: "For ten centavos you can have the little kid."

Just then I heard music in the street and saw a crowd gathering. Everyone in the store went to the doors. Climbing upon a counter to look over their heads, I saw in the midst of the gaping populace, a young Indian bridal couple at the head of a wedding procession.

The procession had paused at the street corner to permit an orchestra composed of a marimba, bass viol, and *chirimia* to play the native equivalent of Lohengrin, while the abashed couple stood rooted in stage fright.

The bride was a lovely doll-like child of perhaps twelve years of age, with orange-tinted cheeks and fawn-like eyes. A veil of rich lace fell about her face and floated far behind her into the hands of a small boy and girl. The blouse which covered her agitated breast was made of the finest lace and upon it lay a *chachal* of silver coins and crucifixes and two glossy black braids. From beneath her long straight Indian skirt, bound about her sleek hips by an ornate *faja*, peeped her bare brown toes. Her little right hand, gloved in white, woodenly grasped a sheaf of



stiff white calla lilies, while the other hand clung tensely to her husband's arm.

He, poor fellow, had been put into ladino clothes; black felt hat, tight fitting black suit, and shoes, to which he was painfully unaccustomed. He had no native Jeeves to solve the problem of knotting a white bow tie, so it had been given a simple twist and the ends left to hang loosely upon his white shirt front. Not knowing what else to do with his white-gloved hands he held them determinedly as though they were fugitives from justice. He stared miserably at the ground, occasionally shifting his weight from one pain-racked foot to the other. Doubtless he was thinking of the blissful moment when he would be alone with his bride—and could remove his shoes.

The procession had come from the church and was on its way to the home of the bride. When the music ceased, it advanced a block and paused again for another tune.

An hour later, as we drove out of San Cristóbal on our return to Quezaltenango, we saw a funeral procession.

The coffin, covered by a rich dark mantle, was borne upon the shoulders of four stalwart Indians. They were preceded by six *cofrades* dressed in the resplendent trappings of their office, each carrying a shining silver mace, or immense lighted candle in a lavish silver candlestick. Behind came the disconsolate widow and the impassive-faced family and friends.

Glancing back I saw the procession enter the cemetery upon the hill and file between the dark cypresses and white crypts and tombstones to the open grave.

Swish! Bang!

A rocket burst high in air above the cemetery with a report loud enough to awaken the dead.

It was the *último adios*.

## X Happy Bathers

**B**EFORE DAWN we started on a five-hour safari into the Cuchumatanes to Huehuetenango. For several miles we traversed a rolling plateau. On either side the road was lined by octopus-shaped century plants. Then suddenly it dropped off into an immense barranca. Far below a wide river serpentine along the verdant canyon floor. On the far bank rose a little tile-roofed town with a large silvery cathedral gleaming in its midst. Olin-tepeque.

We looked upon historic ground. Four hundred years ago in this peaceful valley the Spaniards defeated the Indian hordes, and Alvarado slew the valiant Quiché king, Tecúm Umán, in hand-to-hand combat. The gore of the wounded and dead dyed the stream scarlet and it has ever since been called the Rio de Sangre, the River of Blood.

Above the town stood an appalling range of mountains clothed with black forests. A diagonal, ocherish scratch showed us our road. And before long we were toiling up the mountain side, up and up until even the distant mesa upon which lay the ghostly city of Quezaltenango was spread out below us. The cone of Santa Maria was a flat triangular shadow against the leaden sky.

Then we entered a pass and turned our backs upon civilization and our faces to the wild forested mountains.

A gray fog veiled the sunrise, intercepting its warming rays. The cold congealed the blood in our veins. Lencho's purple hands were all but frozen to the steering wheel.

It was hours before we began to thaw out. In the meantime we rolled through a majestic Turneresque country of limitless vistas—and pothole roads. Crack! went a spring. But the break was not bad enough to halt us.

As the morning advanced, the little villages through which we passed began to stir to life. Indian workmen appeared on the roads. We saw some men from Todos Santos, whose long red and white striped trousers have earned them the nickname of Uncle Sam's boys.

One of them called out gaily, "What is your hurry, old woman?"

The Spanish of the Indians is full of mixed genders.

Toward nine o'clock we reached Huehuetenango. After warming our vitals with a breakfast of *pan dulces* and coffee at a small German hotel, we went out into the town. The sun had now come out and its magic light bathed the slopes of the mountains and the white walls of the city. The stage was set but the actors were absent in their far ranchos and villages. I had again come to one of the country's most interesting market centers when there was no market.

During the early afternoon I went to a place on the outskirts of the town and made a water color sketch of the Indian life passing in the road, against the background of Huehuetenango and the encircling hills.

When I returned to the hotel, I found Lencho with the car, repaired and delivered, believe me or not, at the hour promised. He suggested that we run out to see the nearby Mayan ruins of Zacaleu. These consist of a stone pyramid about forty feet high and several undisturbed mounds, concealing similar pyramids, over which cattle and sheep were grazing. It was a bucolic scene in which the pyramid somehow seemed incidental. I had to cudgel my imagination to picture these stubbly fields in which we stood as the court of a populous pre-Columbian city, or this pile of stones up which we climbed as the base of an altar upon which men were sacrificed to appease some awful idol.

The next morning we said good-by to Quezaltenango. We had spent nearly every night there for a week, but of all the places I had visited I knew it least well.

We were to spend the day and night in Totonicapán before going back to Chichicastenango. But just beyond San Cristóbal we came to a natural warm spring in which at least a hundred women and children were washing and bathing. All about were strewn vari-colored garments drying in the hot sun. A pink and blue bathhouse with red tile roof and Fra Angelico arches stood beside the spring. It was gay beyond anything I had yet seen in Guatemala.

Then and there I lost interest in going on to Totonicapán, and Lencho gallantly offered to leave me there and come back for me in the evening.

But when I found myself alone with so much feminine nudity my nerve almost failed me. Would these bathers resent my presence if I stayed to paint? Or would they treat me with goldfish sufferance? There was only one way to find out. And I took it. When I sat down and started to paint, there was a second's cessation of scrubbing of clothes and bodies, punctuated by exclamations which I took to mean, "Why, the nerve of him!" Would a storm of protest follow, or—? With the first laugh I knew all was well.

I can only describe the scene as a scrubbing bee. These women and children were at play with a purpose. While performing their tasks they were enjoying the warm water and sunshine, the caressing suds, the bright colors, and the scent of drying wash. Above all, they were enjoying the opportunity to gossip—to "sharpen their scissors," as the Guatemaltecos say.

One woman, who was scrubbing her clothes on a slab of rock with a round black ball of native soap, had a baby tied on her back in a broad striped scarf. Her rhythmic bobbing had rocked the child to sleep. Another woman had taken time out to nurse her newest born, while a second child, barely old enough to navigate under his own steam, teetered perilously near the edge of the water.

The laundresses stood knee-deep in the spring, their skirts tucked up well above water line. Those who had taken off their blouses covered their shoulders with a *servilleta* to ward off the



fierce rays of the sun. The brilliant sunlight glistened upon the wet amber shoulders and breasts of the bathers and shot in bluish gleams along the sleek surface of their black hair.

When these Indians bathe, they make an honest job of it. They spend hours shampooing and rinsing the long hair in which they take such pride; soaping themselves, scrubbing each other's backs, and pouring the warm water over their lightly toasted torsos with carved gourd *guacales*. The children are then subjected to a thorough dunking. Unlike white youngsters, they merely grimace when suds get in their mouths or eyes.

There was a beehive murmur of gossiping tongues; the sound of low laughter. The volcanic water bubbled up from the rocks, heated by earth and sun and opaqued by soap, rippled in a hundred conflicting circles, reflecting the light of the sky, the warm flesh tints of the bathers and the gay colors of materials.

Every movement of these people was full of wild grace. The bodies and limbs of the young women were soft and rounded, the breasts high and firm, the gold-tinted skin unblemished by hair. Their faces had an earthy, peasant beauty: wide cheek bones, slightly slanted eyes, flat nose bridges, and full lips that disclosed always two perfect rows of flashing teeth when they smiled. The small hands and soft arms of the *lavanderas* were

surprisingly strong. As they pounded and scrubbed the soapy garments, their pendulous breasts marked the steady rhythm. Tick-tock, tick-tock.

Upon emerging from the bath, the women modestly covered themselves with a bright, flowing *sábana*, holding the upper corners in their teeth while putting on dry clothing beneath.

Men and boys gathered about me, voluble, amused, and interested. They would point at the figures they recognized in my painting and call with their low, carrying voices to the living models. Some of these, no longer able to restrain their curiosity, wrapped their skirts around their wet thighs and came to look.

Their comments—some in too-fluent Spanish, some in Quiché—passed over my head. I only understood when they teased a shy maiden who had inadvertently exposed herself completely in the nude. Their funning made the poor child's cheeks flame with color like the breast of the quetzal.

Then the sun dipped behind the western mountains, drawing its warmth with it and robbing the earth of color with which to paint the clouds. The Indian women left the spring and gathering their gay wash into big baskets which they set upon their heads, went home, shrouding the lower half of their faces with their scarves in fear of the evening miasma.

Lencho had not returned, so I walked slowly back to town. Something of the still beauty of the valley and of the white-walled city lying along the green banks of the serene Samalá entered my soul and made me feel at peace with the world. The brief tropical twilight gave way to sudden night.

Stars splashed the sky. The town shut itself up for the night, all save a small cantina. A few dark figures were silhouetted against the yellow light of the doorway, from which issued the rattling wooden notes of a native marimba.

A silvery moon swam into the sky. The frogs in the marshes began their croaking serenade.

I strolled up and down the river bank, idly drinking in the ghostly beauty of the old Spanish church in the misty moonlight, while Lencho quarreled with his girl in Totonicapán. I was sure they were quarreling. I wondered if they would make up—and forget me altogether.

## XI

### Utatlán

#### THE RAINS CAME.

May had been a month of bright green mornings and late afternoon rains, but in June nothing was so rare as a day when the sun shone.

Reports arrived of landslides, floods, and mired cars, and Chichicastenango was all but cut off from the outside world.

One day a party of intrepid tourists got through, after battling mud for nine hours. Several times their cars had bogged down, and Indians and oxen had got them out. At other times they had slithered perilously near the edge of yawning barrancas. The cars were so caked with mud they looked like Indian ovens, while the chauffeurs were plastered with mud from getting out in the road. All were famished and exhausted.

The next day the rain thinned to a mere mist, and the Ly-mans, a young honeymoon couple from Greenfield, Massachusetts, asked me to go with them to the ruins of the ancient Quiché capital of Utatlán, near Santa Cruz Quiché.

Utatlán, before the conquest, stood upon an isolated mesa, accessible only by a stone viaduct and a steep stairway. The Quiché might easily have defended it against assault. But after their defeat near Quezaltenango and the death of their king,

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Tecúm Umán, by the lance of Alvarado, their morale was broken. They believed the Spaniards to be invincible in battle.

An ancient prophecy was remembered: From the East shall come conquerors, bearded and white. Couriers from Mexico had told of the tragic end of the great lord Montezuma and of the fall of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City).

At Quezaltenango, the Quiché braves had found that courage and numbers were of no avail. The fair-skinned Spaniards wore shining garments no arrows could pierce, and used weapons that belched thunder, lightning, and death. And their leaders bestrode terrible beasts with iron hooves. Many Indians believed that beast and rider were one, that the fearsome white strangers were more than men, and that it was folly to war against gods.

So when the dashing blond Alvarado, whom the Mexicans called Tonatio or Sun, marched with his forces upon Utatlán, the Quiché nobles decided to use cunning where valor had failed. They sent an embassy to the Spaniards with gifts of wrought gold, feather mantles, and decorated cotton fabrics as fine as silk.

"We have come to offer submission," they told the astonished conquistadors, "and to invite you to our capital."

But when Alvarado rode into Utatlán at the head of his followers, he noted many things that made him uneasy. He saw that the only approaches were the narrow causeway and a steep flight of steps at the other end of the city, and that both approaches were guarded by battlements, while precipitous gorges surrounded the city. His apprehension was increased when he saw no women and children, either in the streets or in the market place. He began to suspect a trap.

At the palace he was met by the nobles, who welcomed him with fulsome speeches. Meanwhile Alvarado's Indian spies had discovered that the Quichés plotted to fire the city during the night while the Spaniards slept and that large bodies of warriors had been concealed in the neighborhood to kill those who tried to escape.

Convinced that this was the case, Alvarado trumped up an excuse for withdrawing his forces to the open plain without any appearance of alarm. So successful was his own ruse that the most important nobles agreed to accompany him. Alvarado then



turned the tables, seized the Quiché princes, secured a confession of their guilt, and burned them at the stake.

Stung to fury, the leaderless hordes of the Quiché sought to revenge the death of their nobles by throwing themselves in a mass upon their enemies. But the Spaniards well understood how to meet such an attack. The Indians, protected only by light shields of wood and turtle shells and clumsy cotton armor and skins of animals, were easily cut to pieces by the bullets, swords, and lances of the conquistadors. When the battle ended, the kingdom of the Quichés was a kingdom no more, but a province of the crown of Spain.

Alvarado again rode into Utatlán. But this time when he departed he left the city a shapeless ruin.

We who came here four hundred years later found only a great court, covered with broken flagging and overgrown with weeds, surrounded by several large mounds. Two of these mounds had been partially excavated, disclosing the stone construction. In the side of one was a niche, blackened by recent pagan fires. Perhaps the Indians who worship here today know from ancient legend that this was once the altar of their ancestors.

Rain. Rain. Rain.

The Indians had prayed their gods to send rain for their milpas, and the gods had heard.

The gray skies poured water upon the earth, and the earth gave back a damp exhalation. The air was water only slightly mixed with oxygen. My bedroom smelt of mildew and the sheets were clammy cold when I went to bed. My very bones felt moldy.

Watery sounds filled my ears from morning to night. The slanting streets of the town ran with temporary rivers. The market women could no longer sit in the plaza. People collected under the dripping arcades of the buildings, and the *sopilotes* on the roofs were drenched and miserable.

Then one morning the sun came out. The sky was painted blue again. The flowers in the patios lifted their heads. And the glad *sopilotes* spread their great silver-tipped wings to dry.

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Padre Rossbach's young nephew Ernst came and suggested we walk to the mill three miles out of town. We let out our stride, exhilarated by the lightness of the dry air. The road, owing to the rapid drainage, was already as dry as though there had been no rain.

We passed a multitude of Indians going to market with all their goods, their pigs and sheep and laden mules and ponies. The strong-muscled, weak-voiced men saluted us with a "'Dios, señor!'"

They moved nimbly up the steep hills under incredible loads. One man was carrying his tired child on top of his heavily packed *cacaxte*. Once we saw a man from Sololá knitting a *mextate* as he walked.

By the mill at the foot of the hill was a small roadside market, where women were selling bananas and the green tasteless oranges which grow in Guatemala. The swollen stream filled the forested valley with a subdued surflike roar. We followed the stream out of sight of the road and then took off our clothes and stretched out on the grass in the welcome warmth of the sun.

By the time we were ready to start back to Chichicastenango we were thirsty, but while the water of the stream was crystal clear, we did not dare to drink it. So, to wet our throats, we bought some of the green oranges.

The steep climb up the hill heated our muscles and made us sweat. I felt as though the dampness of the past weeks was leaving my bones. The hot sun kept our shirts dry.

I was so glad to see the sun that I had thought only of enjoying its brilliance and heat. Tomorrow, I told my conscience, I would paint.

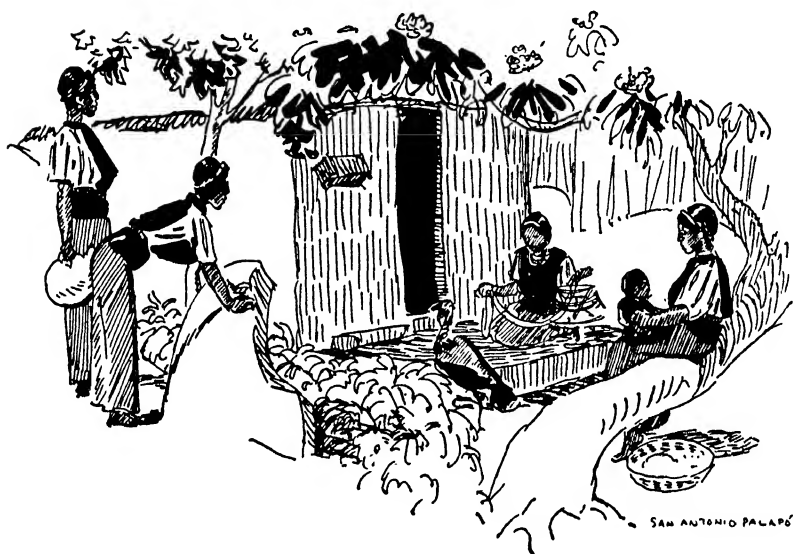
As we entered the village, we heard the pulsing pound of a drum and the shrill chirping of a *chirimia*. And on approaching the plaza we saw the piper leaning forward with a drum strapped to his shoulders and followed by the drummer, in the lead of a procession. Next came the prayer-makers holding their flashing silver staffs. Behind them were a group of men bearing upon their shoulders a life-size statue of the patron saint of the village. A long file of men, women, and children followed, moving in a slow, measured rhythm to the beat of the drum.

The pyramidal steps of the milk-white church were blackened

by kneeling figures swinging smoking clay censers. The air was heavy with the murky smoke of *pé m* burning on the pagan altar at the foot of the steps.

I asked Ernst the meaning of these solemn rites.

"The Indians," he said, "are praying for more rain."



## XII

### Scarlet Haloes

**A**CCORDING to the weather-wise, a brief *canicula* was due the end of June, and I decided to spend this rainless interval at Lake Atitlán.

And for convenience I roomed at the Tzanjuyú, since the manager, Don Ernesto, operated the mail launch by which I could visit some of the lake villages.

The hotel stands at the foot of a giant headland with the cliff at its back and the water at its door. In the past few years the lake, ever rising, has claimed land and beach and three successive docks, which may be counted in the limpid depths. Half-submerged trees hold their leafy branches above the water many yards from shore.

In pens beside the hotel were chickens, pigs, and a wild peccary. Ducks and geese waddled freely about in the dirt yard. Arriving guests were greeted by a medley of barnyard sights, sounds, and smells.

The lower porch was filled with potted flowers and birds in cages and entirely screened by a single vine, but still was not an attractive place, possibly because, on one of the world's most beautiful lakes, one asked not privacy but a view. But there was a second story with an unobstructed view across the lake

where the great scarred cones of Tólimán, Atitlán, and San Pedro rose wreathed in clouds.

The morning was sunny, and I climbed above the hotel by the up-curving road cut in the cliff's side and, finding a seat on a large stone, drank in the beauty of the mountain-rimmed blue lake. Directly across the ten-mile width of water, upon a lagoon that divorced Tolimán from San Pedro, lay the village of Santiago de Atitlán to which I wanted to go to see its ancient church and beautiful women.

Along the tawny road below me passed many little brown people with strong agile steps, the men as colorfully dressed as the women.

At the bend of the road from which the lake could best be seen, most of the travelers paused to invite their souls. For the Indians have a deep feeling for beauty. *Ay, que chula!* (Ah, how beautiful!), is one of their commonest expressions. Somewhere in *Green Mansions*, Hudson says, "The sense of the beautiful is God's best gift to the human soul."

Around the bend, in a deep fold of the hills, was a waterfall, a lovely splashing vertical stream, tumbling down from the rocky rim of a precipice two hundred feet above. Across the silent chasm came its low, steady murmur.

In the afternoon the south wind blew in the rain in a gray torrent that veiled the volcanoes and whipped the leaden surface of the water.

I was the only guest at the hotel until the bus from Quezaltenango drove into the yard and deposited a small man with a large Stetson and dark glasses. He came up on the porch where I was sitting, half feeling his way with his hands.

We soon fell into conversation and he told me his name was Harold Dilley and that he had been born in the States, but had spent most of his life in Mexico and on the south coast of Guatemala. We ordered some Guatemalan beer and as we sat and talked he related his experiences with bandits, cattle rustlers, and Indian women. He was a living adventure magazine. And now, at forty, he was paying for his colorful life on the fever-ridden coast by the loss of his eyesight. Over-dosing with quinine had done for the optic nerve.

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The next morning a bright sun irradiated the three grim volcanoes and the painted lake. I gulped down my breakfast, anxious to start for Santiago de Atitlán. Dilley also wanted to go. At the dock lay the gray mail launch, the cockpit still covered with tarpaulin. I did not like the look of that undisturbed tarpaulin. And when I saw Don Ernesto's solemn face, I guessed that the tarpaulin had a definite connection with what was on his mind.

"No boat today," he said bluntly. "I can't afford the trip for only two passengers. But," he added slyly, "you can charter the boat for the morning for double fare."

Sunshine was at a premium. I did not want to waste it. And as there seemed to be no other way of crossing the lake, we agreed without haggling. The tarpaulin was removed. The Indian pilot started the motor, and we chugged off. Our perspective of the shore line widened, bringing into view the low summer villas of the rich set amidst orange trees and gardens splashed with scarlet.

Dilley had brought his guitar. He strummed the instrument softly while he hummed *Cielito Lindo*. Beautiful little sky. There was a yearning note in his voice. All the bright world was growing dark for him. "I had to get a guitar," he said, "when I knew I was going blind."

In all the years he had lived in Guatemala, he had never before been on Lake Atitlán.

"Is it as pretty as they say?" he asked.

I tried to describe to him the blueness of the sky and of the water, in which the white clouds gathering about the sloping shoulders of the volcanoes were reflected. And I told him about the white villages which dotted the precipitous green walls of the mountains.

"There are twelve villages named for the twelve apostles," I said. "Or so I have read many times."

We asked our Indian pilot how many villages there were.

"Perhaps fifteen," he said.

"Fifteen! Can you name them?"

"*Como no.*" He pointed around the horizon. Only seven apostles were accounted for.

Dilley smiled. "And Santa Caterina was certainly no apostle."

I sighted a strange waterfowl of the grebe family which the pilot called *pok*. I learned later that this bird is found only on Lake Atitlán.

At the end of an hour we rounded the mysterious Cerro de Oro and entered the long lagoon shadowed by Tolimán. Ahead of us swam an ungainly *cayuga*, speedily propelled by ten oarsmen. Six or eight *cacaxtes* were stacked in the crudely shaped bow, while a dozen women and children squatted on the bottom amidst an odd assortment of bundles. This clumsy dugout canoe was making for a small beach where three other similar craft were drawn up. Four women in white *guípiles* and bright red skirts were filling their water jars at the water's edge. A low ridge ran along the beach, and above the trees poked the peaked roofs of primitive thatched huts, topped by inverted clay pots. It was a touch of darkest Africa.

Our pilot steered toward a wooden dock jutting out from a rocky point. Squares of red and white wash patterned the rocks of the little cove, where a bright congress of women in scarlet skirts stood in the water beating their laundry upon the flat-topped boulders. The water, touched with gay reflected color, laved their rounded calves. Their skirts, which were knotted about their knees, were held in place with a simple twist at the waist. They wore white cotton *guípiles* slightly touched with design, and their hair was bound with vari-colored circular *cintas*.

Leaving this colorful scene reluctantly, we made our way toward the town by a rough path which led into a dirt lane between high stone fences covered with cactus. At a turn in this lane we found ourselves suddenly waylaid by five slender saints in scarlet haloes. But we soon discovered they were saints in appearance only. In reality, they were very devils of tourist-wise saleswomen who did not want to let us by until we had bought of their store of gaudy men's shirts. But we did not like their shirts nor their enterprise, so with a "*no me gusta*" we went on our way.

At length we came to the plaza, bordered by feathery trees. Across the plaza a broad flight of steps led to the beautiful old church. It stood, massive but light, with a columned portico above high steps and a great square campanile, flanked by crum-

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bling walls. I stared in wonder. Don Ernesto's extortion no longer nettled me. It was worth it. Nowhere else in Guatemala had I seen a church so impressive in its simple yet varied architecture.

Padre Rossbach once said to me, "A church must have steps." And he is right. A tall flight of steps induces a spiritual feeling that only the white spire of a New England church can equal. The Maya temples were virtually no more than a semi-pyramid of steps raising aloft their altars and idols. And the steps of the church of Santiago de Atitlán are so grand they suggest a Mayan temple in themselves. Perhaps the Indians sense this and see in the joining of steps and church the marriage of two religions which from the beginning had much in common.

We ascended the steps and entered the great gloomy nave of the church and in spite of the bare walls and floor and the rifts of light in the moldering roof we found ourselves talking in whispers. I had a similar experience when I first entered the Cathedral of Chartres. But here there was no magnificent stained glass rose window. All was decay. The splendor had departed, most of it to the Mayan Inn, but something remained that inspired reverence and awe.

Where the glittering altar had been were three shabby statues of saints in tarnished frames, vaguely lighted by the wavering flares of a dozen tapers. Five men knelt in the shadows, their low-voiced prayers rumbling in the darkened corners like elfin thunder.

Out in the town the streets were filled with women and children hurrying toward the plaza, and I found a handy stone to sit on and sketched.

The dress of the women had the classic simplicity of that of ancient Greece, plus color. Their skirts were simple *cortes* of rose-petal red wrapped tightly around their slender hips and legs, coming below the ankles, and making a soft flup-flapping sound as they walked. A small purple silk yoke, edged with a tiny fringe and rows of small colored figures decorated their white *guipiles*, and across one shoulder, they slung a long scarf striped in red and indigo with one tasseled end which hung down in back. They carried their babies Zutujil-fashion astride on one hip, and their proud oval faces were framed by flaming scarlet haloes.



The men of the town wore white shirts and white shorts embroidered with small figures like the women's *guípiles*, and held up by a crimson sash, tied so that the long ends hung down in front.

As these pictorial people passed, silhouetted against the milky walls of the church, white accentuated color and color enhanced white.

In passing again through the plaza we found it bustling with activity and patterned with the red and white costumes of the market women and the dark tunics and checked *rodilleras* of the merchants. There was no time for a sketch, but my enthusiasm reached the pitch where I wanted to spend the whole of my time on the lake in Santiago de Atitlán.

"*Hay un hotelcito?*" we asked an Indian.

"*Si, hay,*" he said, pointing down the street across the plaza.

The hotel was too small to have a name. We entered through a little cantina and passed into the patio. The owner showed me a small narrow room with a bare floor and furnished solely with a hard *banco* and one chair. For these rough accommodations he wanted one dollar and twenty-five cents a day. I protested that it was too much.

"*Pero, señor,*" he said, "for that I will give you special meals and put pine needles on the floor."

As there seemed to be no other place to stay, I said I would come back and take the room the next day, weather permitting.

On arriving at the dock, we were surprised to find every seat in our private launch pre-empted by Indians, and the entire hold filled by their *cacaxtes* and bundles. The only space left for us was on the little poop deck.

They were mostly young men, traveling merchants from Sololá, returning from the humid coast. One man had slumped forward upon his *cacaxte* and gone to sleep. The others were talking and laughing, like traveling salesmen the world over. Perhaps they were discussing the girls of the different villages they had visited.

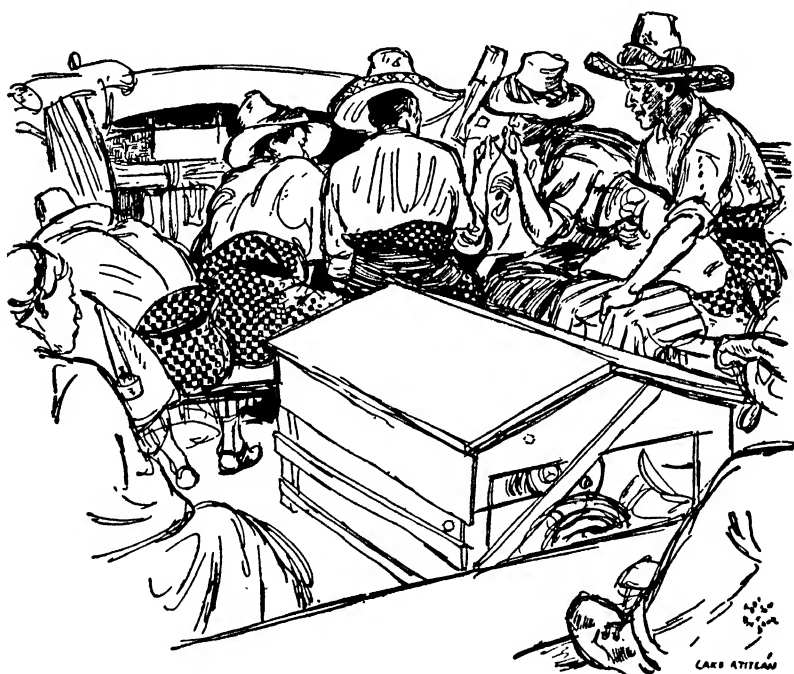
After watching these men with interest for a while, I got out my pad and sketched them.

Once on looking back, I saw that we were being followed by a strange craft with a tall rectangular sail hoisted from a mast in

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the bow to aid an undersized motor. The hull was designed on the lines of Noah's ark, the gunwales clearing the water by six feet despite the fact that it was carrying a full load of Indian passengers. This queer apparition was named the *America*.

When we docked at Tzanjuyú, Don Ernesto collected ten cents from each of the Indians, although rightfully they were our guests since we had chartered the boat for the trip.



## XIII

### The America

RAIN HAVING prevented my returning to Santiago de Atitlán, I gave up the idea of going there to stay, and on the next clear morning visited another lake village, San Antonio Palapó. Don Ernesto again doubled the fare agreed upon just as the launch was supposed to start, only this time a barge full of young coffee trees was lashed alongside, and of course it didn't increase our speed to have to tug an embryo coffee *finca*.

San Antonio Palapó clambers up the steep mountain side, its thatched adobe houses placed higglety-pigglety wherever a ledge affords space. A rough stony path snakes upward to the little plaza with its *pila*, school, *comandancia*, jail, and church, which is partly in ruins. The bells have been removed and hung under a thatch shelter at the edge of the plaza, making a picturesque foreground for a breath-taking view of the lake. The women wear a cherry red *guipil* with white kimono sleeves, a bright blue *corte* and red *faja*, while the men have red-sleeved shirts and a black wool tunic with a red sash. It is a charming little village.

I painted enthusiastically all morning, and when I returned to the hotel in the afternoon, I saw a tall, blond young man with a predilection for strong plaids standing on the porch outside my room with a camera pointed, not at the majestic volcanoes across the way, but at a little white house on a near-by

spit of land. Don Ernesto's son introduced him to me as Webster McBryde, and I learned that he was a fellow of the Social Science Research Council of Tulane University, and that his seemingly eccentric choice of subject was made in the interest of science, as three years before he had photographed the same house, which then stood high above the water, whereas now it stood on the brink of imminent inundation.

I showed him my sketch, and he told me that his wife also painted. They were living on a near-by coffee *finca*. He said that Don Ernesto had offered to rent him a boat with an out-board motor by the week, and that if I wished we could use it to visit the lake villages together. So next morning we got the boat, which was old and leaky, and set off for San Antonio Palapó, as it was rumored that a new market was to be started there and we both wanted to see it. His wife did not come, because they had had a frightening experience a few days earlier, when their motor had died during a fierce storm and their boat had nearly capsized before they could paddle to the nearest inlet. I had already seen some terrific storms sweep the lake, and had been told that every now and then a native *cayuga* goes down without trace, as few of the Indians know how to swim. We soon discovered that the motor was as old and leaky as the boat, but with much tinkering it finally got us to San Antonio Palapó. When we climbed up to the plaza, however, we found that the market rumor was false; so leaving Web to his own devices, I went off to make a water color of the charming little church.

In the *galeria* of a plastered adobe rancho in the foreground a woman was seated at her winding frame. When she saw me painting, she asked for money, but as she was hardly more than a brush stroke in my picture, I merely laughed at her demand. Then she did me an unexpected service. To air her imagined grievance, she stopped every woman who passed until a most interesting group was formed. But as I sketched them on my paper, some boys who were looking over my shoulder, broadcast the fact, and the woman of the winding frame tried to persuade them all to demand money. She then egged the boys on to annoy me if I did not pay, and one of them even tried to put his hand in my pocket. About this time Web arrived, and while he talked to the boys and argued with the virago, I finished my

painting. When we went off without giving the trouble maker anything, she flew into a rage.

"*Ladrones! Thieves!*" she cried after us. "Stone the thieves, stone them!"

But though the boys followed us all the way down to the dock, no stones whistled past our ears, and when we pushed off they waved friendly farewells to us.

Web was working on a map of the lake, there being no accurate one then in existence, and so we skirted the shore and put in wherever he found an advantageous spot to take sights. But the warm sunshine sparkling on the crystalline water suggested only one thing to me. While Web made notes, I stripped and went for a swim.

Once we entered a rock-bound cove where the water bubbled and steamed, and smelled strongly of sulphur. In the sun-shot pellucid depths darted little prismatic fishes, and by the rocky bank the Indians had built a trap of wattled twigs to catch them.

As I stood ready to dive, Web warned, "Look out for the springs, they're scalding hot."

I dove into the warm sulphurous water and came up in a current that ran icy cold, and wherever I swam I felt hot one moment and cold the next. In a short time I was winded. Then I remembered the five-thousand-foot altitude.

By the time we left the little cove the breeze, which had shifted from the north to the south, had freshened. The lake's surface was agitated and streaked with flat lanes where strong air currents depressed the choppy waves. Our motor whined and sputtered as we bounced along. The sun shone brightly upon the lake, but inky clouds were beginning to shroud the volcanoes.

About midafternoon we entered the half-moon bay of Santa Caterina Palapó. Some naked Indian boys were splashing in the shallow turquoise water down the curving sandy shore. We tied up at the broken dock and went ashore. A dense growth of palms and mangoes screened the little village from view. Our path entered a tunnel of leafy shade which came out upon a small plaza where, in a burst of sunlight, stood an amazing little rococo church, painted in strong hues of blue and Indian red. The thatched ranchos of the village were scattered beneath the trees along winding uneven dirt paths. Men were lolling in sisal

hammocks slung between dark writhing tree trunks and overhung with big leaves and dangling balls of green fruit.

Suddenly the deep shade became preternaturally black. Thunder rumbled in the distance. And a strong gust of wind tore through the tree tops. Whoosh! Leaves scattered through the air like a flock of startled birds. We turned on our heels and raced back to the dock, where our boat was tossing and tugging at the painter.

As we cast off, the first big drop of the storm fell with a plop. Others followed, plop, plop, plop. Web jerked the starter rope and we described an arc out into the middle of the bay. Some of the big rain drops hit our leaky carburetor and, with a low moan, the motor died. Web spun the starter feverishly until his hands and temper were raw, but was rewarded by only a few asthmatic coughs. The wind drove us toward a rocky headland. We had no oars.

Rain drops pattered thicker and faster. On the steep sides of the volcanoes black masses of clouds whirled with fearful velocity. Great torn curtains of mist were being driven this way and that. A torrent of rain could be seen advancing across the lake. Would our boat be capsized, blown upon the rocks, or swamped by the downrush of water?

Web worked furiously. The motor spat, sputtered, spun! With a triumphant whine, we cleared the hazardous point. Flying before the wind, we reached the little inlet at Tzanjuyú just as the storm, with a blinding flash, burst upon us. Water crashed down from the sky in torrents. Wind beat the massive oaks until they labored and groaned. Lightning cracked above a cannonade of thunder.

While the storm raged, we sat on the enclosed porch of the hotel and planned to go to Santiago de Atitlán the next morning.

During the night, however, Don Ernesto had been doing a problem in simple arithmetic. He had been charging me two dollars a trip, whereas Web was paying only five dollars a week. So in the morning when we came for our boat Don Ernesto, with his sly smile, told us that he had sent the motor to a mechanic to be overhauled. It might take a week or a month, *quien sabe?*

Web, however, had another motor, which, though in bad shape, he thought he might be able to put into commission. So

we went back to the *finca* and got it, but when we put it in the water it would not go, and we had to give up. While we were conducting this experiment, I saw rocks floating upon the water and discovered that they were pieces of pumice stone, as light as dried sponges.

As we put the motor away, Web said, "We can drive up to Sololá today for the Friday market, and across the lake tomorrow with old Hair-On-His-Face."

"Old who?"

"Crespo, the man Aldous Huxley said convinced him that everything in Prescott and Bernal Diaz was true. He runs a sort of Chinese junk called the *America* in competition with Don Ernesto."

The Sololá market is the largest in the lake region. It occupies a shelf of land a sheer two thousand feet above the lake, with San Pedro's symmetrical cone filling the distance. Every lake village was represented, and the medley of spectrum colors of the costumes, seen under a Tiepolo sky, made an unforgettable spectacle. The smell of pigs, garlic, and leeks mingled with countless unnameable odors. Web checked the market with a chart he had made three years ago and found the same number of venders from the same number of villages occupying the same market positions and selling identical wares and provisions. While he checked, I sketched, and it was long past noon when we started back to Tzanjuyú.

Just outside of town, Web stopped and put on skid chains as the road was steep and slippery.

"The law makes you take off your chains before you enter a town," he growled as we went on, "and I figure that in driving from here to Guatemala City I would lose four hours just changing chains. Some of the traffic laws in this country just don't make sense. I've been arrested for blowing my horn in an open square, and for not having filters on my spark plugs to prevent radio interference. I have hardly ever driven into Sololá without being arrested for something—dirty license plates, carrying someone on my running board, or some other darn fool reason. It got so I was more afraid of the Sololá police than of Chinese bandits.

"But one day I got an idea. I had dedicated my book on Sololá

to the president and received a letter of acknowledgment with his signature and seal of state. The next time I was stopped, I showed the letter to the illiterate cop. 'This says I am not to be molested,' I told him. He stared at the signature and seal, saluted respectfully, and since then I haven't been bothered."

The sun, which I was not to see again for many a week, was shining brightly next morning when Web, his wife, Van, and I went to Panajachel to take the *America* to Santiago de Atitlán. We found the old tub see-sawing at the dock and slowly being filled with Indian merchants, dressed in the tawdry clothes they sometimes wear on the road, and with their strange loads.

Don Emilio Crespo was even more picturesque than his boat. He wore a beret, blue jumper, and a thick black beard that would have attracted stares even in a Parisian café. They say he claims descent from the conquistadors, and stories cluster about him as thickly as bees about a honeysuckle vine. He is a sort of living local John Bunyan. His piercing eyes, bushy brows, and eagle-beaked nose combine to give him that indomitable look that impressed Huxley.

As he is many things in this life, including a taxidermist and antiquarian, the house into which he took us was littered with animal and snake skins, Mayan and colonial relics, and knick-knacks of all sorts. On the floor of the *galería* was the black twisting coil of a six-foot *masaquate*, the Guatemalan constrictor, recently dead. Then there was a stuffed quetzal, which he claimed to have kept alive for three weeks, the longest period of time an adult bird had ever been kept in captivity.

When the *America* was so jammed with Indians and *cacaxtes* that there was scarcely room left in the poop for our boy pilot, his pup, and ourselves, she was deemed ready to start. Don Emilio said the fare for Indians was seven centavos, and for *yanquis*, fifteen centavos.

In Santiago, Van wanted to make a water color of the *lavadas* on the rocks, so Web and I left her at the waterfront while we walked up to the plaza—Web to quiz officials, I to sketch the market. Many women and boys gathered around to watch me work, and their most frequent comment was, "*Trabaja muy ligero*" (He works very fast). I had to. I had but an hour and a





half before me, and I did not want to miss a single important note of that strange and brilliant scene.

Time up. But before leaving, I bought an entire woman's costume to send to my daughter Nancy. She had written that she wanted "an Indian dress, size 14 (!), to wear at my first fancy dress ball." I added the (!).

The wind now came from the south, so that our sail was again filled for the homeward crossing. But in mid-lake the motor began to miss and finally, with a gasp and a wheeze, it died. Dependent only upon the sail, we barely budged. The boat wallowed and dipped with a vicious movement that churned our insides. Then the breeze failed, the sail hung limp, we lay becalmed. There was an electric tenseness in the air. Formidable black clouds were blotting out the volcanoes at our backs. A gray curtain of mist spread over the sun, turning its light a sickly amber. A few big rain drops splashed the deck. We knew that when the wind came up again it would bring the usual afternoon tempest. The *America*, which was as open as a bathtub, offered no refuge from the rain, and we had left our slickers and ponchos at home. Mocking our plight, Don Ernesto's launch chugged disdainfully by.

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Don Emilio's son tinkered cheerfully with the recalcitrant motor. He lay back-down behind the engine cover, his bare feet sticking out. They had a certain indomitable air; they were, after all, Crespo feet. The confidence they inspired was justified. The motor ran again, and we reached Panajachel ahead of the gathering storm.

As this would be our last day together, the McBrydes took me home with them for a *despedida* lunch, which had been prepared by their crosseyed ladina maid Elsa. She received two dollars a month and considered it a good wage. Toward evening Arnulfo stopped by for me with the Mayan Inn truck to take me back to Chichicastenango, and I regretfully said good-by to Van and Web, but we planned to meet again in Quezaltenango during the next canicula.

As Arnulfo drove up the steep, sharply curving road, I looked back upon Lake Atitlán. The storm had passed, and on the rippling cerulean surface of the lake I counted seven centipede-like *cayugas* crawling back from market to the little white towns, each set in its own little cove. The purple-coned volcanoes, Tolimán, Atitlán, and San Pedro, made a triple wedge against the sky.

I had crossed the lake with Indian merchants who were going to the *fincas* and villages on the coast beyond that mountain barrier to a country unknown to tourists. What was it like? To learn, one would have to stay on the *fincas*. And this, although I had not the least notion of it at the moment, was what I was going to do during the next five weeks.

## XIV

### Finca Life

THE NICE THING about Guatemalan hospitality is its spontaneity. On my return to the Mayan Inn, I met the *administrador* of one of the country's finest coffee *fincas*, who invited me to go back with him the next day.

So, on the day after my arrival, I left Chichicastenango for Finca Mocá on the south slope of Volcano Atitlán in company with the genial *administrador*, Tom Jessup, and two drunken Indians.

These two Indians, one of whom was supposed to be the chauffeur and the other a *mozo* engaged to work on the *finca*, had spent part of the night at a *zarabanda* and the rest of the night in jail. It took Tom an hour to secure their release, and they were still drunk as owls. Dumping them into the back of the Ford station wagon, Tom himself took the wheel.

"Mean stuff, white-eye," he said. "Be three days before they're fit for work."

He had come up from the *finca* in search of labor, but had found only one *mozo* willing to work. He was worried, not because of the labor shortage, but because we had got a late start, and there was a dangerous grade—the San Lucas hill—which we

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had to go down. If we did not get down before the rain caught us, it would be just too bad, he said.

At the Panajachel river we saw a truck stuck fast in mid-stream. A vain effort had been made to dislodge it by means of two yokes of oxen, and now a larger truck was trying to move it, but with no better success.

Tom stopped at the river's edge and looked on with misgivings. A half-hour passed. The big truck gave up and went away. Then a car driven by an Indian appeared on the opposite bank. Without hesitating, the man drove into the swollen stream and crossed safely. Tom followed his lead and crossed too.

We left the main highway at Godinez, where we took a narrow dirt road skirting the rim of the precipitous mesa along the east side of Lake Atitlán. There were magnificent views of the mountain-rimmed lake, but leaden clouds were casting patches of black shadow upon the landscape. Tom watched the gathering storm with an uneasy eye.

"If it rains, the San Lucas hill will be like soap," he said. The chauffeur, who was an excellent driver, was still blind drunk, but Tom talked of making him drive.

But we won our race with the rain. The terrifying grade was dry. As we descended the narrow, steep road with its crumbling precipitous banks, and hitched around turns that were almost too sharp for our short wheelbase, I saw why Tom had been anxious. To drive down that grade when it was wet and slippery would take nerve, good driving—and luck.

We were now in a semi-tropical country where palm and pine, mighty *ceiba* and slender bamboo all grew together. We had come down some four thousand feet, and the air was warmer. Now and again we passed coffee *fincas*. The two-story houses of the owners and the administration houses generally had an air of faded splendor. But the rancherías, or workers' quarters, had never been more than rude huts, roofed with lamina or thatch, and few of the Indians wore tribal dress.

Rain was falling when we reached Finca Mocá. Occupying a mountain amphitheater on the side of volcano Atitlán, the houses and the buildings of the *beneficio* are situated on the hills surrounding a charming natural lake. The palatial home of the English owner, Mr. Gordon P. Smith, faces the lake across a

tropical garden hedged with hibiscus. Beyond, in a garden on a knoll, stood the house of my host.

During the night I was frequently awakened by weird thumpings and scratchings on the roof. At five o'clock I started up again when the *finca* bell fractured the stillness with its metallic clamor. This was to rouse the *mozos*. Their women, from long habit, had been up for some time at their back-breaking task of grinding masa. As I lay half awake, I could hear the faint patting of *tortillas* like the rhythmic beating of elfin drums coming across the barranca which separated us from the rancheria.

Before long I heard Tom stirring. I got up and met him on his way down to the administration building to start the day's work. Dawn was filling the sky with pearly light behind the great shadowed cone of Atitlán, that loomed startlingly above us. Blue mists filled the deep wooded clefts in its side, below the purple sand slips. From the barrancas came the fluting of wild birds accompanied by the splashing beat of rushing streams. The ridges of the barrancas were covered with deep forest, and I did not realize until later that these were cultivated woods to shade the sensitive coffee bushes. A coffee *finca* is the most beautiful of all plantations, because it least violates the natural scheme.

At seven Tom returned for breakfast, served on the sun porch by a handsome, whisper-voiced, barefoot Indian boy named Carlos.

Tom asked me if I had been disturbed during the night by strange noises on the roof. "I meant to tell you not to be alarmed," he said. "They are only *taquasines*." *Taquasines* are opossums.

After breakfast we set out on horseback. We passed the company *tienda*, the house of the *mayordomo*, the *juzgado* or police court, the jail, the school, and went on up through the hive-like rancheria. All the houses were set on concrete foundations and had trim white-washed board walls and *lamina* roofs, painted red. The rancheria was laid out in straight English lines, which must have made the Indians unhappy, for all this uniformity and trimness was against their natural curve-loving grain. They suffered it, as they suffered the white man's sanitation.

There were ranchos for a thousand families. Quite a little town. It had its own Indian *alcalde* and *alguazils*, and its own

little chapel, where a visiting priest held mass twice a year. Tom pointed out a tall *ceiba* topping a nearby hill, where the Indians had their own altar between the flanging roots of the sacred tree.

A sour stench came from the sties where mud-covered pigs rooted and grunted. There were whiffs of rotting fruit commingled with the clean scent of native soap from the long, lamina-roofed *pila* where a dozen women were scrubbing their clothes, some with babies jolting in the scarves on their backs.

These women wore the costume of Chichicastenango, from where most of the *colonos* on Mocá come. They giggled among themselves as we passed. I was having difficulty making my horse keep pace with Tom's, and a *mozo* cut a switch for me. Rubbish and Poppet, the dogs, dashed about chasing chickens and barking at the blond and black *chompipes* or turkeys, which answered with a chorus of gobbling from their scarlet and blue throats.

Every *mozo* pays for the light bulb in his rancho, otherwise he would steal it. Indians find a use for every bit of glass or tin they can lay their hands on. Webster McBryde has listed over one hundred different uses for Standard Oil tins.

Every *mozo* is compelled not only to make a bed, but to sleep in it. If he displays a stubborn preference for his *petate* laid upon the floor, the *alcalde* puts him in jail until he consents to change his ways.

Few *fincas* compete with Mocá in protecting the health of their *mozos*. These efforts are unpopular and add to the difficulty of securing labor, for the Indian likes to be left alone. When he falls ill of an infectious disease, he usually refuses to be isolated, with the result that epidemics are hard to control.

As we passed through the rancheria, I saw women and girls moving nimbly through the streets with their water jars, while others leaned against the waistband of their looms in the shade of their ranchos. Life, so far as most of the women were concerned, carried on in the manner of their native village or milpa.

Now we entered a shady lane under the spreading *chalum* trees, through the tops of which the sun filtered down to the lustrous-leaved coffee bushes below. These grew thickly to a

height of about six or seven feet. All along the drooping stems the green coffee berries were forming in little clusters.

For a long time we rode up and down steep barrancas, filled with the low roar of swift streams, and terraced by rows of spiky izote plants, set out to halt erosion.

Far back in the hills we came to a big tank, filled by a mountain stream, from which the coffee berries during the harvest are sluiced through pipes down to the distant *beneficio*, at a great saving of leg power and time.

Emerging upon a high ridge, the immense volcano of Atitlán seemed within hand's reach, a truncated pyramid, dark and fearsome, filling the cold tropic sky six thousand feet above us. Below, the green hills diminished to the flat, hot coastal plain, edged by the silvery shimmer of the Pacific.

Clear, metallic notes, like the call of some strange tropic bird, echoed through the hills, and Tom explained that we were nearing the place where men were planting, each division of *mozos* being under a *caporal* who directed them by blowing upon his *bocina*, or tiny bugle. Soon we saw the men. They had discarded their tribal costume, in favor of white duck pants rolled to the calf, but their unquenchable love of color was expressed in bright colored shirts and scarlet sashes.

Three units of workers labored in a well integrated effort; diggers, carriers, and planters. The first went ahead, digging square holes some six feet apart, large enough for the young coffee plants, which were brought up from the nurseries on the backs of the carriers in specially made *cacaxtes*. The planters followed, setting out the young bushes.

Farther along we came to a fourth group of *mozos* engaged in trimming and bending. And in another section of the vast *finca*, which covers six thousand acres, we saw a gang of weeders, and a number of boys employed in making manure of rotted berry pulp and earth which had been urinated by drainage from the stables.

Then we dropped down into a beautiful valley where the upper reaches of the Rio Bravo (Wild River) wound through a high growth of broad-leaved plants, which give the place its name, Valley of the Hoja de Sal. On one bank of the river, under a shelter of sticks and leaves, were two large beds of cof-



FINCA MOCA'

Young coffee plants arrive from  
the nurseries on the backs of *mozos*



fee seedlings. Here for the first time I saw women working with their men. The men were expertly digging up the young coffee plants with their machetes without disturbing the tender roots. Carefully they handed them to the women, who wrapped the earth-bound root in a leaf of the *boja de sal* and tied it with a piece of vine.

Planting, trimming and cleaning. These are the principal occupations of the *colonos* during the rainy "winter" months while the coffee is slowly ripening.

It was midday when we started home. Passing again through the *cafetal* where the men were working we saw them in the path, sitting around little fires, over which they were heating their coffee and *atole*. They made a sort of gypsy camp. Forked sticks driven into the ground by the side of the path were hung with their blue jackets, net shoulder bags and gourd water bottles. Some women had brought hot dishes to their men all the way from the rancheria.

A few drops of rain had begun to fall from the now overcast sky, and many of the men were hastily constructing shelters of sticks and plátano leaves.

The *guisquiles*, *guicoys*, and other vegetables which we had for lunch had been brought down from the highlands by the Indians. When I expressed astonishment that they had not been grown on the *finca*, Tom explained that it was cheaper and less trouble to buy them from the Indian farmers, in spite of the great distances these men had to travel on foot to supply our table.

After lunch we retired to our rooms for a siesta. Guatemaltecos are curious people. They get up in the middle of the night, and go to bed in the middle of the day.

During our ride over the *finca* I had been constantly fighting clouds of *gegenes*, or tiny gnats, and now I found all my exposed parts covered by an itchy red rash from their countless stings. Tom gave me a bottle of lemon juice lotion which helped to soothe the irritation.

That afternoon, kept indoors by the rain, I read a book by Dr. Strong on the filaria, or blinding fly, illustrated by nauseating photographs of victims, taken on the *finca* and adjoining plantations. Altogether, not pleasant reading.

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Tom came up to the house at four o'clock for a spot of coffee, served in the usual Guatemalan fashion; that is, with coffee essence, hot milk, hot water, and a dash of cream. The essence is made fresh every day, drop by drop, with infinite care and patience, from coffee that is a mixture of hard, acid *boca costa* beans and the softer, less acid beans from lower altitudes. The perfect cup is a mysterious blend of the elements above mentioned.

"Good coffee should be as hot as the hub of hell and as strong as the love of a woman," said Tom, tasting his own concoction appreciatively.

To get the real flavor of coffee as the tasters do, he said, you must not gulp it down, but take a little in the mouth, spray the tonsils with it and aim for the nearest cuspidor!

In the evening we tuned in on the news broadcasts from London and Berlin, and at seven-thirty Carlos appeared, ghostlike, in the doorway and whispered, "*Ya esta la comida*" (Dinner is ready).

Before retiring, Tom had a nightcap of black coffee. "All nonsense, that coffee keeps you awake," he said. "There isn't as much caffeine in coffee as there is in tea. I drink coffee five times a day and it never affects me."

The coffee was so delicious that I drank along with him. Gradually, however, I cut down my coffee-drinking to a cup at breakfast and an afternoon demi-tasse. Tom accused me of weakening from psychological reasons. "The Sanka ads have got you," he chided.

After that first bright morning, the sky disappeared behind a universal ceiling of leaden gray wool, a vast cosmic sponge that for days and days was in a process of contraction. The rhythm of those days was the drip, drip, drip, of rain drops from leaves and eaves.

Mocá has an average yearly rainfall of one hundred and seventy inches, and it all falls at this season. The rains were light, but steady, punctuated by *temporales*, when the short, swift Rio Bravo would overleap its banks, uprooting trees and shrubs, capturing unwary animals, sweeping like a tidal wave to the

sea. At times the sudden rise would flood the generator plant, six feet above the bank, and lights would blink out.

Every day I went out to paint, although I would return to the same place time and again to catch a rainless moment for work. The mileage on my paintings was staggering. I would return soaked and soiled, and as clothes could not be laundered, with no sun to dry them, Tom lent me some of his shirts and pants, although he was some five inches shorter than myself. I got by with it by rolling up the shirt sleeves and tucking the pants' legs into my boot tops.

My wandering off alone, accompanied only by Rubbish and Poppet, along the confusion of trails that sometimes led through dense wildernesses of forest trees and lianas, at first worried Tom. He wanted me to take a *mozo* along. "You might get lost, or fall into a barranca and break a leg or your neck, or be bitten by a snake," he said. "Why take such chances?" I scoffed at the idea. But one day, returning late, I found him about to send out a search party for me. After that I always told him beforehand the direction I intended to take.

One afternoon the dark clouds broke up, and volcano Atitlán came forth in a glory of pink and gold light. Grabbing my paints, I dashed out to make a sketch. Just then there arrived from Chicacao, twenty miles away, an itinerant barber. He had come on foot, making his periodic rounds of the *fincas*. My hair had reached the length where, as President Roosevelt once wise-cracked, I needed a barber or a violin.

"You cut, I'll paint," I proposed.

He grinned. "*Como no. Mataremos dos pájaros con un tiro.*"

Aside from killing two birds with one stone, respect for art stilled his tongue; for Indian barbers, like their professional brothers the world over, are great gossips. The only sound that came from him was the snip-snip of his scissors, while a million fine jackstraws of hair kept covering my paper as fast as I could blow them off. Right then I knew the full meaning of having "someone in your hair."

## XV

### Chicacao

“**C**HICACAO HAS the prettiest market in all Guatemala,” Webster McBryde once said.

Naturally a statement like that would stick in my mind. I asked Tom about Chicacao, and one rare sunny Sunday morning he told off a barefoot Indian chauffeur to drive me there. “Come back before the rains start,” he cautioned.

There was not a cloud in the sky. Volcano Atitlán stood out as clearly as in a glass vacuum; *guardabarrancas*, *cenzontles*, and *pito-reales* filled the bright air with song, and the ground orchids lifted their purple clusters to the warm sun; yet one talked with foreknowledge of the imminence of rain.

As we wound downward, the countryside grew more and more tropical looking. A choking network of blue morning glories overspread the undergrowth. Wild plátanos with spiky scarlet flowers, misty fern trees, and enormous uncanny clumps of bamboo struggled through the matted green density. Above all rose the lofty ironwood, *amate*, and *ceiba* trees, swathed in creepers, their high limbs streaming lianas and bristling with red *pie-de-gallos*, in every cleft an orchid, parasite upon parasite, like the human order. Oriole nests, like gourds, hung from the branches of the oak, *hormiga* and *matilisguate* trees. The air

was freighted with a moist, cloying odor of rotting things, of perfumed flowers, of fecundity.

Low tropics and high tropics meet in this indeterminate region, which the Guatemaltecos call the *boca costa*, or mouth of the coast. There is a strange overlapping of climatic opposites. And in sheer sumptuous growth and decorative beauty it surpassed anything I had ever seen.

Glancing down into the misty green depths of a barranca, I realized how truly huge is a big tree. I could follow the trunk of some mighty tree downward to where its roots were lost yards below the deep undergrowth, and then look upward and see its branches flung aloft incredibly high against the sky.

Macaws and parrots made gaudy splashes of red and yellow through the rank foliage. Minute jeweled humming birds pulsed on invisible wings before gigantic flowers. Millions of yellow butterflies covered the road, and rose in waves of liquid sunlight around the car.

Our road traversed *finca* after *finca*, since the *fincas* are the only centers of population between the widely separated villages, and the roads are built and maintained by them. We saw an experimental nursery of young quinine trees, great fields of sugar cane and pastures of cattle, which had been sent down from the less fecund highlands to graze. Some of the *fincas* were down-at-heel, but picturesque; others vied with Mocá. On one prosperous looking *finca* I saw ranchos for the *mozos* being built of brick and tile.

Volcano Atitlán receded to a blue pyramid in the distance, but Volcano Santa Cruz, almost its twin in appearance, rose to take its place in the foreground. Wherever you travel in Guatemala a glowering volcano surveys your progress with its constant threat of eruption.

The heavy heat of the low coast fell like a physical weight upon the landscape, striking back in blinding white light.

We saw some women working about their ranchos, naked to the hips. Chickens bathed in the dust. Big sows lay stretched in the shade with a pushing litter of little pigs at the multiple pink teats. Naked brown children, with swollen stomachs and bewildered faces, rolled on the bare earth.

A beautiful Indian girl dressed in a red striped skirt and a

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light embroidered cotton blouse, gave me a haughty glance as we passed.

"*Que chula*—how pretty!" I exclaimed.

"Of a truth," said my little brown chauffeur, his dark eyes melting.

Occasionally we bore down upon a creaking wooden-wheeled oxcart. The slow-moving animals, with yoked heads pressed nosing down to earth, drew to the side to let us pass.

As we neared Chicacao, the road was like a pilgrimage. Hundreds of Indians, dressed in their festive best, were hurrying to the Sunday market.

In the market, under the rows of tropical almond trees, were countless more Indians, pressing together, brown-faced, hushed-voiced, silent-footed. Nearly all belonged to the coastal tribes. Their costumes were perfectly suited to the hot climate and the flamboyant scenery, being woven lightly of cotton and patterned in high-keyed designs to match the brilliant flowers and the gay plumage of tropic birds. Everywhere in Guatemala you will find the same correspondence between costume and setting. The Mayas of the mountains wear heavy woolens, somberly designed in black, brown, indigo, and mauve to tone in with the brown banks of barrancas, the black sheep covering the mountain slopes, the pine forests, and the mauve peaks of the volcanoes.

I sat in the purple shade of a great spreading tree and painted the life around me. It made me think of a big family picnic. There was a gaiety of mood as well as of color. The Indians laughed and gossiped with each other in low voices as they passed leisurely between the aisles of almond trees or squatted on the grass beneath, their little spread of merchandise before them. They were like children playing at keeping store.

Near me, balanced on her heels, a comely woman was braiding a beautiful *cinta*, many yards long and of varied color and design, into her dark hair, lustrous as the folded wing of a *cenate*. As she did so she carried on a sprightly conversation in the Oriental-sounding idiom of her tribe with a woman seated opposite her who was giving her breast to a child of perhaps three years of age. Behind this pair a third woman, tired apparently of waiting for trade and anxious to enjoy new contacts,



was helping her little girl, dressed exactly like herself, onto her back. Near by, squatting on his haunches, was a ten-year-old boy in a blue suit and straw sombrero, munching on a cob of roasted corn. A queenly woman of Atitlán passed by, holding in her hand a recent purchase wrapped in a banana leaf and tied with a piece of vine. Her *canasto* or basket, was perched primly on her head, the pad holding it above the gorgeous diadem of her *cinta*. The end of the blue and red scarf covering the *canasto* hung coily down by her cheek. The babe slung on her back, his

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chubby arm hanging out listlessly, his head drooping, was fast asleep, lulled by the rhythmic swaying of his mother's hips as she moved softly and slowly through the plaza.

Beyond the rim of shade the bright sunshine made the brilliant costumes more dazzling, while the rows of parasol-like *almendras* superimposed a pattern of light and shadow upon the pattern of vivid and contrasting colors at their roots. Glancing up, my eye was caught by the black shape of a *sopilote*, gliding gracefully on the soft currents of air above and, following its light movement, was directed to the cone of the distant blue volcano, as perfect as a Japanese print of Fujiyama.

I found myself liking these people of the *boca costa*. They have a full-blooded warmth and natural good humor; and the women have not only the remarkable grace of carriage typical of all the aborigines, but also an amazing beauty. Their beauty of body is provocatively revealed by their simple garments. They are all woman and not, like their corseted American sisters, half-woman and half-mannikin.

The men are strong, spiritually as well as physically, like the Chinese. I felt that they were friendly at heart, if one could vault the barrier of superstition and well-founded distrust of the white man.

At noon dark clouds suddenly materialized, casting their ominous shadow across the plaza. The chauffeur appeared, anxiety shadowing his bronzed features, and I regretfully closed my sketch box.

How the weather had changed from the calm sunny morning! The landscape now was plunged in gloom and the south wind made every leafy thing seem to have St. Vitus dance. But luck was with us, and we arrived safely at Mocá, just as the rain came hammering down.

My morning in Chicacao made me want to know more of the coast, so Tom sent a telegram to his friend Don Conrado Mezger, owner of a sugar cane plantation near the coastal village of San Sebastián, Retalhuleu. With characteristic Guatemalan hospitality, Don Conrado wired Tom to shoot me along.



## XVI

### Tropical Tropics

THE SUDDEN difference in altitude from Mocá down to Guatálón station—a drop of twenty-five hundred feet in eighteen miles—made me partially deaf for ten or fifteen minutes. When I spoke, the sound of my voice came as a muted echo, like a weak effect of ventriloquism. The change from the cool hills to the hot and humid coastland was, at first, equally drastic and oppressive. It was a cloudless, burning day, and the sun's bright glare stabbed my eyes. But when my senses became adjusted to the change, I was glad to see tropical vegetation, yield to tropical languor, inhale exotic odors and listen to the throbbing chant of the jungle—in short, to be in the tropics, in the tropics. For in the cool, pine-clothed *altos* you might almost imagine yourself in a northern latitude, except for the strange bright pattern of Indian life and the shortness of your breath.

The road by which I came down from Mocá was in fair condition considering the havoc continually wrought by the rains; but that there was a road at all was something to praise the gods for. A few years ago there was nothing but a stony trail down which the *arrieros* drove their coffee-laden mules, and if the Rio Bravo happened to be on a *parranda*, there was no telling how you would get through. It used to take Tom several hours to ride up to the *finca*, and once when he brought his wife home

from the city after the birth of their youngest son, the babe was carried in a *cacaxte* on the back of an Indian.

Some cows dashing frantically down the track, announced the approach of the train, which presently appeared at the mouth of the tunnel of greenery from which the track emerged. There were only two passenger cars; one for second class, filled with sprawling Indians and their bundles and baskets; the other for first class, half occupied by Spanish women in light dresses and coatless men in riding breeches and puttees, many of the latter carrying revolvers on their hips. Smoking in the cars was permitted and promoted sociability. At every station women vendors clustered beneath the windows and did a lively business in fried chicken, *jocotes*, and water coconuts. To travel by train in Guatemala is to sit at a continuous feast.

The train plunged through damp green jungle depths, splashed by scarlet *balyconias* and gay morning glories. In every misty gully grew plumelike tree-ferns, twenty or thirty feet high. Now and again we came to a clearing with picturesque bamboo, palm-thatched huts. Indian women, naked to the hips, stood in the doorways, forever combing their night-black hair. About their feet swarmed nude, pot-bellied children. Mules rolled on the ground, according to their favorite habit, while pigs and chickens rooted and scratched in the sand beneath the slanting palm trees. All around rose the thick forest, silent, cool, and still. At other times we rumbled over spidery trestles spanning dizzy barrancas. Through the green chasms far below, coursed silvery streams, in which naked women and children were bathing.

I was met at San Sebastián station by Don Conrado Mezger, a massive, gentle-mannered man with a slight lisp. Almost his first words were:

"I didn't think I could make it, the road is so bad."

I was puzzled in view of the perfect day. But it seemed that during the night there had been a *temporal* and the road had been nearly washed out in places, making it virtually impassable for a low-slung car.

"I've scraped off three batteries in one year," he said.

We drove through a long archway of foliage which made for beauty above but cussedness below, as the sun could not get through to dry up the mud. We seemed to be rolling along on

the level, but Don Conrado assured me that we were climbing steadily. His hacienda, though only three miles from San Sebastián, is one thousand feet above it.

Along the road we passed women in rainbow-striped skirts, carrying their brown babies on their hips, as the Zutujil women always do. They were tall and wonderfully graceful, and their warm orange-brown flesh glowed in the sunshot shadows. But under the stare of Nordic eyes, they covered their bare breasts with the brief blouses the local authorities try to force them to wear, but which they doff whenever possible.

Arrived at Hacienda Buena Vista, the Indian gatekeeper's little girl swung open the big gate to let us pass, and we entered upon Don Conrado's private kingdom where he is truly monarch of all he surveys. For something like a mile we drove through waving walls of sugar cane until we came to the *casa grande*, a two-story frame house built after the fashion of the tropics with encircling *galerias*. It stands against a hill planted with coffee and *chalums*, with an enclosed garden on one side and immense cement coffee drying patios on the other, and at the head of a great irregular plaza surrounded by cattle pens, storage houses, schoolhouse, carpenter shop, office and dispensary buildings, houses of the *mayordomos*, coffee and cane *beneficios*, police court, jail, and—crowning a small hill—a private church. Buena Vista is no gentleman's farm. It is a real *finca*, a smooth running organization which produces coffee, sugar cane, bananas, and cattle for the market, and its owner is proud of its integrity.

We passed through the cool lower *galeria*, with its red tile floor, flower boxes and hanging baskets of ferns, to a comfortably furnished open *sala*. Here I met Doña Leonore, Julia, Conrad, Carl, and Arnold. Old Nayo, the stooped Indian *mayordomo* with a narrow, creased dark face and slight mustaches at the corners of his mouth like a Chinese mandarin's, brought *frescoes*. I soon felt at home amidst this delightful family. Big Don Conrado is an American of Swiss-German parentage; his frail and charming wife, a native of Quezaltenango. This mixture of races makes the Mezgers a linguistic family, German, Spanish, and English popping at a dizzy rate through their speech.

All three boys have their work: Conrad is the *finquero*; Carl, the *vaquero*, and Arnold the keeper of the ledgers in which are

entered the complex accounts of the three hundred and fifty *colonos* and a greater number of casuals, who come from a distant San Sebastián—the Indians of the near-by village of the same name being too independent to work as hired laborers. I soon discovered that Julia and her mother were forever busy doing odd things for the families of the *colonos*. For a Guatemalan *finca* bears a basic likeness to the California ranch of the days before the gold rush: it supports a small group of whites of undisputed paternal authority and a vast group of dependent Indians, who look to the *casa grande* to supply shelter, food, tools, and necessities.

In the cool of the evening Don Conrado and Arnold drove me over the parts of the *finca* accessible by car. Arnold, although crippled by infantile paralysis and compelled to walk on crutches, took the wheel. His manly spirit makes no concession to his infirmity. He rides horseback and plays games that are not too rough. That night he trimmed me at Ping-pong, and I didn't throw the game, either.

The rancherías on Buena Vista are scattered over the vast domain. We passed through several whose ranchos were built of bamboo or wood with solid brick corner posts and tile roofs. The men were still in the fields and there were only blouseless women and naked babies about.

It is a beautiful *finca*, comprising low, rolling hills covered with pale-green sugar cane; immense *potreros* for the fat herds of cattle in which mighty *ceibas*, *amates*, *matilisguates*, and iron-wood trees have been left standing with good effect; broken valleys watered by brawling streams and mountainous steeps, upon which the coffee and banana plantations melt into the fecund tropical forests.

We left the car in one of the rancherías and, walking to the weed-grown place where the former *casa grande* once stood, stared in awe across the valley at the frightful smoke-vomiting volcano of Santa Maria which destroyed it thirty-four years ago.

Announced by earthquakes that virtually destroyed the city of Quezaltenango, the eruption of this volcano was the most astounding cataclysm ever known in a land whose history is largely a record of volcanic disasters. In the terrific upheaval

one entire side of the twelve-thousand-foot mountain was blown to pieces. White-hot boulders were tossed far across the Mexican border, forty miles away, while it is said that some of the ashes reached the stratosphere and rained down upon distant parts of the globe. Sulphurous clouds of smoke and flying stones, earth, and ashes from the flaming crater darkened the land as they spread ruin and death. The astonished and horrified people who sought refuge in the stoutest houses were crushed to death when the walls and roofs collapsed under the sheer weight of ashes. Others who hid in caves were buried alive. For weeks people went about holding dishpans over their heads to protect themselves from the hail of stones.

Out of the mighty labor of the burning mountain a new volcano was born. Don Conrado has watched it grow, year by year, into the present sizeable mountain, called Santiagito,\* with a murderous record all its own.

One night a few years ago, a certain *finquero* left his house to drive to Retalhuleu. A river which has its source at the base of Santiagito runs through the *finca*. A rickety bridge spanned it. When he came to this bridge, the *finquero*, being a nervous man, got out of his car and walked across, leaving his Indian chauffeur to take the car over. The night was pitchy dark. As he crossed the river, he heard a dull roar. And as he stepped upon the opposite bank and turned to await his chauffeur, he saw a dark mass moving upon the bridge. There was a momentary shrieking of timbers, above which he heard the despairing cry of his chauffeur, as the bridge and car were lifted and catapulted into the path of that inexorable, grinding dark mass. The air was filled with choking sulphurous gases, and the *finquero* fled in a panic for his life.

This calamity was caused by a combined *temporal* and *temblor* which undermined a wall of the youthful volcano and swept it down the flooded bed of the river. When the distracted *finquero* succeeded in getting back to his *finca*, he found his wife and children and the Indians in the rancheria dead, all having been instantly overcome by the lethal gases. What made the scene more horrible was that everybody was stricken without warning in some momentary act of life. Mothers were found in

\* Called by the Indians Niño Jesús, because it is the "child" of Santa Maria!

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the act of nursing their babes, musicians stood leaning against the wall before their marimbas, young women knelt at their *tortilla*-making, while children lay upon *petates* wrapped in a sleep from which they were never to awaken. All the life of the *finca* was suddenly and simultaneously stilled in death. On beholding all this, the *finquero's* strained nerves snapped, and he became a raving maniac.

When we returned to the *casa grande*, Julia showed me a sheaf of sickening snapshots, taken shortly after the event, of this community of lifelike corpses. They were the most gruesome scenes I have ever had the horror of looking at.



## XVII

### One Hundred Women and a Man

**D**ON CONRADO offered me a horse to ride during my stay, but I preferred, despite the heat of *tierra caliente*, to follow my usual practice of scouting the country on foot. It is the only way to discover pictorial material.

The rancherias of the *colonos* were scattered through the hills and were exactly like any Guatemalan Indian villages. There was no formal settlement like the tidy concentrated camp on Mocá. Some of these tiny villages, set in tropical vegetation, were exceedingly picturesque, but I found that whenever I visited them a second time with the intention of making a painting, the women would call their children and shut themselves up in their ranchos.

When I asked Don Conrado about it, he said it was only natural that the women should be frightened by the appearance of a strange white man amongst them when all of their men were absent in the fields.

After this I never tarried in the villages, but wandered off into the hills where the jungle grew densely and the trails were sometimes dangerously confused. More than once I thought I had lost my way, and I don't mind admitting that I was scared. There is always, in the tropical forest, a suggestion of suffocation, mystery, and evil, arising from the suspicion of venomous

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reptiles, inimical insects, and poisonous plants. Before long indeed Don Conrado was treating me for *matasamoras*, a fungus growth that eats away the flesh between the toes, and *chichicaste*, a poisonous nettle, from which my hands had become so swollen and stiff that I was obliged to bind my brushes to my fingers with strips of cloth.

Wherever I went, I had the feeling of being watched, spied upon, and occasionally a wild halloo would echo through the hills. If I met an Indian woman walking alone, she invariably took to her heels.

One morning I chanced upon five Indian women and three children bathing and laundering clothes in a little stream. One of the women, who was stripped to the waist, was young and tall and had such a beautiful face and form that I thought the Tlascalan princess who enchanted Alvarado must surely have been such another. Her eyes, which were slightly elongated, and her hair, which fell in rippling blue-black waves below her sleek thighs, were of exceptional beauty. Her skin, though browned by the sun, glowed with a warm sheen, and she had the usual fine Indian teeth, and beautifully shaped breasts, arms, and hands. She was, at the moment, shampooing the head of a small naked boy.

Wanting to paint her at this task, and remembering the complacency of the bathers of San Cristóbal, I stepped over to the bank and sat down upon a stone. Nothing happened, so after allowing a little time for them to get used to my presence, I opened my paintbox, but the instant I did so the women dropped their wash, grabbed their children and fled, as if in abject terror of their lives.

My efforts to recall them being ineffectual, I cut off through some fields with the intention of showing them that I was going away and leaving them free to return to their tasks. When I last saw them, however, they were still standing in the road with an air of indecision, as if suspecting a ruse.

I found myself in a wild valley, and in the absence of any paths, I followed the banks of a creek that ran through it. Every now and again a hidden Indian would give a bloodcurdling halloo from the bush that would be picked up and repeated the whole length of the ravine. Although I could see no one, I was under



constant surveillance, and I was aware that my movements must seem strange, like those of a fugitive. Not caring to give this idea, I cut back up the steep side of the ravine, through brushwood that tore my hands and clothes, in the direction of the road. But upon reaching the road whom should I meet but my five women from the stream. They were jabbering excitedly, but the instant they saw me they stopped dead in their tracks, speechless, as if confronted by a *duende*.

I was standing on the high bank above the road, but they held back as though I were blocking the way. Greatly puzzled, I smiled reassuringly (I hoped) and told them that the road was theirs. After a low-voiced consultation, the oldest, a hag with long flat breasts drooping from her bony chest crossed herself and stalked stiffly by, head held rigid, repeating aloud some strange Indian litany or incantation against evil. One by one, as I watched in amazement, the others did the same, the last to pass being the good-looking young mother with the small boy.

When they were all reassembled a short distance up the road, they turned on me with a shrill torrent of purple epithets, their eyes flashing angrily. The old hag stooped and picked up a stone and made a threatening gesture with it, while the one whom I thought had the beauty and bearing of a Tlascalan princess, very unbecomingly thwacked her shapely buttocks and cried, "*Mire, señor! bese mi cula.*" Everything I said to calm them infuriated them the more.

Their angry cries brought two Indian men armed with murderous-looking machetes to the scene. The women besought them to drive me away, and the bolder of the two climbed the embankment to where I stood. I met him halfway, told him what had occurred, and asked him to talk reasonably with the women. He stood studying me in indecision. It occurred to me that he might be the husband of the beauty, and that perhaps he thought I had meant to attack her. Jealousy is the one emotion an Indian is apt to give way to. Anything, I realized, might happen.

By this time a great many Indians had gathered on the opposite ridge of the narrow ravine, and were shouting and hallooing. The amusing episode by the river had grown into a grave situation. Here I stood unarmed facing a man very adept at using the machete he held ready to swing, while five irate women were

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urging him to action, and across the ravine, an excited group was raising a kind of hue and cry. A good deal depended upon my next move.

I looked about and saw near by the ruins of the former *casa grande*, where I had come with Don Conrado on the evening of my first day in *tierra caliente*, and had gazed in awe at the smoldering Santa Maria and her bloody volcanic whelp. Now, in the virginal morning light, I could see the burning boulders spewed over the rim of Santiagito, rolling down the charred slopes, and trailing clouds of dust, like steaming tears coursing down the cheeks of the eternally damned.

I turned to the Indian with the machete and pointed to my paintbox. He took a step backward and gripped the handle of his swordlike tool.

"Oiga," I said. "I am an artist-painter. I wanted to paint the women in the stream, but they did not understand and ran away. Tell them to go back to their work and not to be afraid, for I am going to stay here and paint the volcano."

With this, I sauntered over to a small tree and sat down in its shade facing the blasted, fuming mountain. I left behind me a loud silence. Even the hallooing Indians over on the ridge became quiet. Opening my box, I began to paint. I thought the rumpus was over and became absorbed in my work. Then—whish! Something sped past my head and struck the trunk of the tree with a dull thud. The object rolled back toward me. It was a stone the size of a baseball.

Looking around, I saw the Indian women standing on the hillside above me. The good-looking one was out in front; undoubtedly it was she who had thrown the stone. I picked it up to put it in my paintbox; and the women, misinterpreting my action, took to their heels. But they went only as far as the road, from which blind position they continued to pelt me ineffectually while I painted.

At length the patter of missiles gave way to the clatter of horses' hooves, and Carl rode up on his white horse and drew rein. Leaning forward upon the pommel of his saddle and looking down at me with a quizzical smile, he said:

"I heard you were frightening the women."

"Does this look like it?" I asked, showing him the stone that

had come nearest its mark. I told him briefly what had happened, and he became grave and summoned the women.

"Why did you stone my friend?" he asked them severely.

The old hag spoke up.

"*Por Dios, patrón*, he has the evil eye. He goes about looking and looking, and God only knows what is in that box he always carries. *Vaya!* we were afraid."

Carl chided them for their foolish fears, and showed them my painting. They stared at it and said that it was *muy chula, muy guapita*.

"See! There is nothing in the box but paints. Next time, *no tengan ustedes cuidado*—don't be afraid."

They looked in my box and not finding it filled with dead lizards and old chicken bones like a sorcerer's kit, burst into mirthless Indian laughter. Ha, ha, ha! They bent double and slapped their thinly covered knees. Ha, ha, ha! Then they went off, gabbling like a flock of excited geese. Months later I was to meet again under strange circumstances the tall beauty who had so nearly brained me with a well-aimed stone, and on my account she was to receive a severe beating from her husband. But this is anticipating.

Carl dismounted and sat beside me, his little white horse standing behind him impatiently nuzzling him in the neck. When I finished my painting, he accompanied me home.

The Mezgers were disturbed over what had happened. Don Conrado said that he had heard that word was being passed among the Indians to watch out for a tall white man who looked like a German and acted like a thief. He wanted me to take a boy with me when I went out again, but I declined this kind offer with thanks, thinking that I now understood the Indian mind somewhat better and should be able to take care of myself.

I was curious to see a hammock bridge, which the family had told me about, and which was only a few miles away on the Rio Ococito. But as it would not be easy for me to find it unaided, Don Conrado provided me with a horse and himself accompanied me on a big, powerful mule capable of supporting his great bulk.

The rains of the night before had turned the trail into a muddy trough, and our animals had to pick their way gingerly

and often slipped and stumbled. The trail ended suddenly at the bank of the river, which, wide as a boulevard, dashed over a bouldery bed between high green banks. A short distance upstream, slung like a hammock from the middle branches of the trees on either bank, was the spidery bridge, made of sticks strung on wires, etched against the sky.

Dismounting, I crossed upon it, an experience nearly like trying to walk the tightrope for the first time. Only one adult may cross at a time; were two to try it, one would surely be jounced off into the swift current thirty feet below. I was glad to reach the other side in safety. Don Conrado rode through the shallows, leading my mount, which he tied to one of the trees supporting the bridge, and as soon as I had taken up my position, left me.

The bridge was so interesting that when I came back for a second stay, I returned to it several times to paint, and I always saw women and children bathing in the river. But today there was an absence of life that seemed almost ominous. Were the Indians, informed of my presence by their efficient grapevine telegraph, purposely staying away?

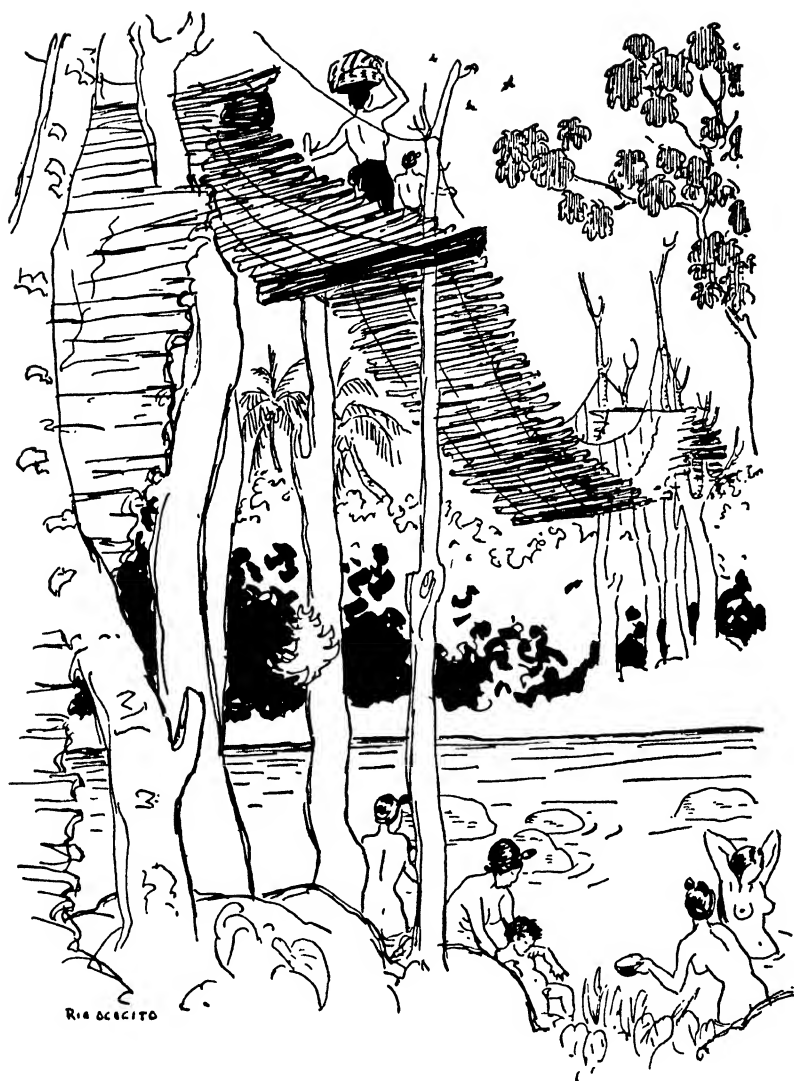
Once a woman with a *canasto* of clothes on her head and a small replica of herself tagging at her heels came by. They were startled on seeing me and the toddler ran forward and clung to her mother's *corte*. They hurried across the bouncing bridge and disappeared from sight. At different times, men came by, and although they always addressed me with a courteous "*Adios*," that Spanish greeting which means hello-good-by-and-God-bless-you, they eyed me strangely as though they knew of yesterday's incident and wondered at my inviting its reoccurrence.

Then a man with the inevitable machete held in the crook of his arm crossed the bridge and came directly toward me. He was an unusually stalwart fellow with dark, wild features, and as he came near I noticed that half of the left hand had been sliced off in an old machete fight.

"*'Dios*," I said, without pausing.

"*'Dios, señor*," he replied.

He came and stood beside me, and there he stood and stood. Whenever I looked down at my paper, I could see his animal-like splayed feet—feet so tough and calloused that they might have trod unscathed on broken glass or burning coals. The stubby toes



A hammock bridge swings from  
the treetops across the Rio Ococito

curved inward like the teeth of a circular saw. As I looked at these waiting feet, I was conscious of the hard, bronzed calves, rolled soiled white trousers, red *faja*, folded arms, and that mutilated paw holding the much-sharpened machete, and I confess the proximity of these uncouth details made me uneasy. At length, convinced that the fellow had a purpose behind his silent vigil, I asked him what he wanted. Without speaking, he drew a folded piece of paper from his *faja* and handed it to me. I opened it and read:

I am sending this boy down there to stay with you and see that nothing happens such as happened yesterday.  
Arnold.

The next morning as I was about to start out on foot for Monte Cristo, the farthest *finca* village six miles distant in the mountains, the Mezgers again urged me to take a boy with me. Again I thanked them no.

"Bull-headed, aren't you?" Don Conrado said. "But I have to go there myself. I'll see you at noon."

I hoped, by going to Monte Cristo, to get a near view of Santa Maria volcano with a picturesque foreground. But as I toiled upward through the beautiful hills, now through shady *cafetales*, now through wild valleys watered by noisy streams, I saw great clouds scudding across the sky. While these boded ill, the sun was ladling out such a stream of white hot lead, I thought that it would burn up the gathering mists.

At one point of the way I saw two men sawing up some big tree trunks. In order to do it Indian fashion—one man above, the other below—they had had to dig a deep trench for the under sawyer to stand in. *Costumbre!*

A proper amount of leg work not having brought Monte Cristo into view, I was wondering if I had, after all, missed the way, when on turning a leafy bend in the road, I came to a natural amphitheater, upon the slopes of which was scattered the picturesque little village. The center of the deep bowl was occupied by the coffee *beneficio*, the very bottom being floored by the glaring white cement drying patios, which formed, because of the uneven terrain, three gigantic steps. The wet *beneficio* clambered up the side of a high cliff, the water for the

fermenting vats being diverted from a stream, whose waters overleapt the cliff in a charming falls. The bamboo-walled, tiled ranchos of the Indians stood upon the brow of the cliff-shelf and straggled along the tawny path that wavered on up into the green hills. Perched like a bird's nest among the trees above me, was the house of the *administrador*.

I walked down to the bottom of the bowl where the road ended, and here I saw a stony spring surrounded by feathery trees. An Indian woman in the bright red *guipil* of a distant village, who was filling her water jar, started like a frightened deer on seeing me. In a small clearing on the hill slope stood the little whitewashed adobe buildings of the police court, jail, and school. As I passed, all the school children jumped up from their benches and crowded in the doorway to stare at the white stranger. Behind them stood their teacher, a pretty girl of sixteen. She smiled, and I doffed my hat. A short while later, this slip of a girl was to perform for me a similar service to that which Pocahontas performed for Captain John Smith.

I now took the trail that wound sharply up through the village. When I reached the top of the cliff, I saw that between the double row of ranchos that stood on its shelving brow ran a tiny brook. Its waters coursed through a little canal built of flat stones in which three Indian women in various tribal *guipiles* were standing and doing their washing. They were using their *metates* for scrubbing boards, and I thought the *tortillas* afterwards ground on these stones would have a strange soapy taste. Naked babies and chickens swarmed about the ranchos and, luxuriating in the rivulet, but a little distance above the village, were several spotted pigs, furnishing the outlandish touch that makes Guatemalan Indian life so endlessly amusing.

The only male about besides the naked babies, was a very old man. I spoke to him in a loud voice, so that I would be heard by everybody, explaining as simply as possible why I had come to Monte Cristo and what I wanted to do. I asked where I could get a good view of the volcano, and he waved a withered hand up the path that meandered through the village and on into the hills.

I walked slowly up through this village of women without men and noticed that by the door of every rancho was painted

an evil-averting white cross. The women hung back in the shadowy interiors, lit only by the sunlight filtering through the porous bamboo walls, and I wondered what thoughts were passing through their shadowy minds. These people, who still grind the *maíz* on their ancient mortar of stone, are no less superstitious today than when the Spanish *teules*, or white gods, came among them. The women who had stoned me two days ago believed I had the evil eye and that my paintbox contained the means of bewitching them. Would I encounter the same superstitious fears in Monte Cristo?

When I reached the top of the hill, I found that the clouds had completely blotted out Santa Maria and her lava-spouting infant, Santiagito, so I turned back and re-entered the village. The women were still at their scrubbing in the little canal bisecting the short street which ended abruptly at the edge of the cliff. Altogether, it was a curious and picturesque scene; I could not have asked for a better subject. But the instant I sat down and opened my paintbox, the women fled into their ranchos. Less mystified by their action than on the former occasion, I endeavored to persuade them that they had nothing to fear. I went to the doors of their ranchos and tried to talk rationally to them, but they retreated to the darkest corners and cursed me and told me to go away.

As there seemed nothing else to do, I left them and looked about for an impersonal subject to paint. There was still the waterfall, and I descended the steep bank through the fringe of a *cafetal* and thick shrubbery. When I reached the foot of the falls and came out into the open, I was astonished to hear a wild shouting, and looking up, saw a hundred gesticulating women ranged along the brow of the cliff. They were shouting all manner of abuse and threatening me with sticks and stones if I did not make myself scarce. They made such a dramatic group, that I could not resist the desire to sketch them, no matter what happened.

When they saw me select a big boulder and sit on it facing them with pencil and pad, they were stricken momentarily dumb. Then their treble cries again rent the air and their actions became more violent and threatening. In another moment the first stone would have been thrown, and with it would have



gone the last vestige of restraint, had not a sharp cry come from the little white schoolhouse.

Turning from the hysterical mob to look in that direction, I saw the slim schoolmistress, dressed in white blouse and blue skirt, dart from the doorway, streak down the hill, and race up the long flight of *beneficio* steps. Her slender legs, encased in white cotton stockings, flashed like a deer's as she took the steps two at a time. She threw herself in front of the wild Indian women, her thin arms outstretched, her spindling legs spread defiantly, one frail girl against a hundred furies. The slightest surge of that fermenting crowd of foolish females, might have pushed her over the cliff. But her spirit cowed and pacified them all. Then she turned to me, flushed and triumphant, and waved as if to send me away, but which sign in Indian means "come here."

I was on the point of complying, when the bushes near me parted and I found myself confronted by an elderly Indian with an escort of two burly young men who held their machetes ready for use. Guessing this trio to be the *alcalde* of the village and his *alguazils* hastily summoned from the fields, I advanced to meet them. It was up to me to do the talking and I did, surprising myself by my fluency. While I reeled off my story, the little *alcalde* watched me narrowly with his close-set Oriental eyes.

"It is well," he said when I had ended, "I see you are a man like myself."

He then asked me to go to the *administrador's* house and attend him there, while he went and talked to the women of the village. I did as he suggested.

The *administrador's* wife, a pleasant and kindly *ladina*, probably less old than she appeared, put her house, which was as clean as wax, at my *disposicion*. Seeing that I was hot and tired, she drew up a chair for me and fetched a glass of cool spring water, which she assured me I might drink without fear. I learned that she was the mother of the young schoolmistress who had done me such an extraordinary service. She laughed heartily at the furore I had created. It was the most exciting event in the memory of Monte Cristo, and would not soon be forgotten.

At length the *alcalde* returned and said I might go back to

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the village without causing any further disturbance, as he had explained to the women that I had intended no harm. Nevertheless, the schoolmistress had sent a sliver of a boy to shield me. The youngster was proud of his assignment and no doubt pleased to be released from school, and he was greatly chagrined that I did not want him. I took him back to the school and thanked the pretty teacher for what she had done.

"Tell me," I said, "what made the women so furious?"

"E-e-e-e-e-e!" she laughed gaily. "They thought you came out of the volcano!"

The women had gone back to their individual ranchos and duties, except their washing in the little canal, when I returned among them. But while they suffered my presence, they still eyed me askance, and when I started to sketch, they shooed their children into their ranchos and ducked if I looked at them too intently.

It was now past midday, the sky was completely overcast, a downpour threatened, and I was on the point of calling it a day and starting home, when Don Conrado rode up on his big mule. He had already heard all about my being taken for a hobgoblin that lived in the volcano, and he derided the women for their childish fancies.

"Does *el señor* look like a *duende*?" he scoffed.

But they only giggled and looked from *el patrón* to me and back again with half-shut eyes, not liking to say what I looked like to them.

We took a short cut home through the *cafetales* and *potreros*.

"If you were to come this way in the dry season, you'd get covered with *garapatos*," he said. "That is one advantage of the rains—they keep down the ticks."

Once he stopped and dismounted to show me a "highway" built by those great ants of the tropics—the *zompopos*. It was about half an inch wide, and the earth was packed hard as tile by the passing of millions of hairlike feet. The highway ran like an elfin tunnel through the undergrowth and might be miles long.

Don Conrado said that *zompopos* were at work in his garden, where they had stripped several trees and rosebushes. They sally

forth only at night when their natural enemies, the birds and domestic fowls, are asleep.

That night we took flashlights and went out to track the voracious ants to their nest, as the only way of destroying them is to locate and dig out the nest, which may be four or five feet deep and as much as forty feet in diameter. We found the marauders defoliating a young lemon tree, and so great were their numbers that we could hear the snipping of their minute scissor-like jaws. Our flashes revealed two lines of workers; one going to the tree, the other marching nestward, each jaw burdened with a bit of green leaf about an eighth of an inch square. It was an amazing instance of the force of numbers; for while the booty of each ant was negligible, that of a million made the stripping of the tree a short night's work. I no longer marveled that the Mayas with unlimited man power were able to build their great temple pyramids. Contrary to common belief, the *zompapos* do not eat the bits of leaves, but store them in their nests and subsist upon the fungus which in time grows on them. In the month of May, a special breed of *zompopo*, called the *zompopo de mayo*, makes its appearance. It is very big and fat and is considered quite a delicacy by the Indians.

## XVIII

### Bali-Like

### San Sebastián

**M**Y PRIMARY object in coming to *tierra caliente* was to see San Sebastián, tropical Guatemala's most tropical Indian village; and one pink and mauve morning Don Conrado drove me there.

We entered the village by a narrow cobbled street bordered by flowering hedges, beyond which I glimpsed high-peaked thatched ranchos set all askew amid the tropical greenery. Half-naked women and girls and naked toddlers moved about slothfully, while pigs, dogs, and chickens took their ease in the sun-dappled shade. We crossed a single-arched bridge spanning a shady shallow stream in which women and children were bathing in Eden-like nakedness. Then we swung into the main street with its low plastered houses—some white, some blue—and all roofed with red tile and shaded by sloping coco palms, drooping mangoes, and starchy *almendras*. Don Conrado let me down before the portico of the *intendencia*, and left me for the day.

Looking back, I saw Santa Maria volcano toppling over the town. Warm yellow sunlight lay like cadmium pigment upon the eastern slope, while shadows, hardly less blue than the lapis lazuli sky, filled the monstrous cavity. Swirling mists of cloud and smoke hid the western half of the mountain. I noted that

Santa Maria holds her volcanic babe on her hip, San Sebastián-wise.

Hot dazzling sunshine and cool purply-gray shadow divided the street, and the deep overhang of the eaves of the sun-facing houses caught an intense reflected glare. A mother and child walking down the sunny side of the street were almost obliterated from sight by the blinding tropical light. Most of the people as well as the chickens and dogs stayed in the languorous shade. An antediluvian oxcart, screeching like a jay being plucked alive, moved in slow motion through a shaft of light made by a bisecting street.

Across from the *intendencia* was a row of parasol-like *almen-dras* with doughnut-shaped pink cement benches about their bases, screening the plaza beyond. On entering the plaza, I saw a pink *pila* and, crowning the rise beyond, the framework of a new church, half-heartedly assuming shape under the desultory hammers of a handful of workmen. On the right was the market place, dull as yet, under the spreading branches of an immense *amate*, and on the left was the long, low *escuela de niños*, before which were ranged some fifty schoolboys. The teacher, rod in hand, was passing down the line inspecting hands and nails. Thwack, thwack, thwack! Not a sissy among them. Inspection over, they broke order, laughing and shouting, and a group formed about a tall slippery pole to see who could shinny to the top, monkey fashion.

The women who came to the *pila* or to the market wore the little loose blouses in pink, yellow, or white, with which the law requires them to cover their breasts in the town center. That the women resent this garment of respectability and refuse to accept it as a part of their costume is indicated by the fact that they disdain to make it more feminine and attractive by adding touches of embroidery or frills and furbelows.

The true San Sebastián costume is simple but time-hallowed: a *corte* for the women, a loin cloth for the men—a costume perfectly adapted to the climate. But the law, in the name of respectability and with an eye to collecting fifty-centavo fines, requires the women to wear blouses and the men to put on pants.

As I passed from the plaza around the far corner of the schoolhouse, I stumbled upon some rock-sculptured monsters,

and pausing to examine them, I saw that they were ancient Mayan idols. I asked a boy where they had come from, and he told me that they had been found in the debris of the old church after the earthquake had destroyed it. These old pagan gods, cast down by the priests but safely hidden in the church altar by the wily Indians, seemed to smile mockingly at the newly rising columns of Christianity.

Wandering through the village, I came to a *plazuela* dominated by a pretty little church painted a bright blue. While I stood admiring, women and children passed, lightly carrying their water jars, baskets, and babies. Some had slipped one arm out of the hateful blouse, others wore it as a sort of bib covering only the breasts, while a few had discarded it altogether. They were the tallest Indian women I had seen, and superbly graceful. They walked with a slow, stately, free-limbed movement, and against the blue background of the church, they were like figures in a decorative frieze.

The farther I strayed from the center of town, the more the Spanish influence waned and the more Indian originality asserted itself. The Indian tropics—the tropics of my dreams—became a reality.

Cobbles gave way to hard-packed volcanic sand, and houses no longer fronted on the street, but hid behind hedgerows, observing no order in their placement beneath the giraffe-necked coco palms and scraggly limbed *achiotes*. Dusky figures moved in the spaces of shadow and color. Now and again I discerned a woman leaning against her loom, while others stood in doorways combing their lustrous hair, which never grows gray. Squatting on the ground, a woman was sewing a *suycal*, a palm-leaf rain cape such as every traveling Indian carries during the wet season.

A woman's voice through the whitewashed slats of a rancho: "*Mire, señor!* what have you to sell?" My paintbox was a perpetual puzzle to the Indians.

Before long I came to an umbrageous rivulet. Citronella grass, elephant ears, spider lilies, wild plantains, *guarumos*—all the lush vegetation of the tropics—profusely covered either bank, while overhead the sky was hidden by leaning coco palms and the dense foliage of breadfruit trees. The humid air was heady with

the cloying perfume of ever-decaying, ever-blooming tropical growth. From a plantain blossom, a jewel-like humming-bird hung by its beak, its little wings fluttering so furiously that they seemed to emit iridescent light. Gorgeous butterflies dipped and flashed above the water.

The brook tinkled over its bed of stones like a toy marimba as it dashed past my feet and rounded a leafy bend, whence came the tantalizing sound of splashing waters and merry feminine chatter and laughter. Stepping from stone to stone to the opposite bank, I saw, through a curtain of living greenery, that the waters widened into a pool in which many women and children were playing as well as attending to the more serious details of life. Remaining unseen, I stared in febrile delight.

As an artist, I love the flesh, but for years my mind has revolted from the brain-racked studio nude. The studio nude is a hot-bed hybrid which has nothing in common with the unconscious clean pagan nakedness of primitive countries. The nude belongs to the pagan world.

As I looked upon these bathers, clean-limbed as marble statues, but warm, glowing, alive, and all unaware of the external eye, I saw naked beauty as the ancient Greeks knew it, but as it has never been known to the Christian world.

A girl whose body had the early maturity of the tropics sat listlessly on a rock, long legs dangling, toes playing in the water, rhythmically running a small wooden comb through her luxuriant dark hair, coppered by the sun. In the lines of the legs, the curve of the back, the beauty-giving touch of the crooked fingers holding the comb, the light palpitating upon the fresh round bosoms, was momentarily caught the fugitive, unposed beauty that maddens the artist's mind.... A brown baby splashed in the shallows.... A woman whose shapely thighs were wrapped in her *corte* as tightly as the corn in its sherd, stood in the water scrubbing clothes on a flat-topped stone, her soft bare shoulders rising and falling with rippling energy, her dangling breasts swaying gently.... A little girl stood with hanging arms, taut fingers, and screwed-up face while her mother shampooed her head.... One woman scrubbed the back of another, the scrubbed one leaning forward with an expression of sybaritic enjoyment.... Nearest to me, but turned away so

that I saw her back and the rounded profile of her breast beneath her raised right arm, was a young woman sitting on her heels in the river and languidly pouring water over her shoulder with a gourd *guacal*. Her head was turned at an exquisite angle, and her freshly washed hair, streaked with shiny blue lights, was twisted carelessly about her head and tied in a knot over her low forehead. A rich terra cotta to her slim straight waist, below the line of her corte her bare thighs gleamed whitely. From the near-by bank a large handlike leaf reached out as if to touch the nape of her slender neck.

While I stood watching, I saw a woman come down the path to the river with the slipping grace of a panther. She carried a water jar on her shoulder, as the women often do when it is empty, not putting it on the head until full. Molded by knowing hands, it was a beautiful jar, such as civilization has forgotten how to form. . . . Further downstream, a woman appeared with a pig, which she led into the water and proceeded to scrub as thoroughly as if it had been her own child.

I knew it would be impossible to paint this scene; if I declared my presence, these nymphs and dryads would either fly from or at me; if they remained, they would be silent, sullen, and unnatural. Every detail of the rapturous picture was indelibly engraved on my mind, but it would remain among the unpainted paintings in the portfolio of memory.

I wanted to slip away unobserved, but I had taken only a few steps when crack! went a twig, and like wild animals at a watering hole at the crack of the game-hunter's rifle, all the women and children darted for the bank and their *cortes* and blouses.

I hurried away.

Walking further in the direction of the outskirts, I came to a long street like a swath cut by a giant's machete through the thick of the jungle. Here and there a smoke-blackened grass roof peeped out of the greenery, but there was no evidence that a wheel ever turned in this secluded byway. It was Guatemala before Alvarado.

Not quite!

When I sat on a stone and began to sketch, I saw a woman coming down the street leading a pig. That pig came from Spain. The chickens that scratched dirt over my shoes were also of





Every day the women and children  
come to the streams for work and play

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Spanish origin. The dog that sat on its haunches in the shade scratching its fleas was another foreign note; the fleas, no. The man who came to the door of his rancho had an American machete gleaming in the crook of his arm. But these were the only outside touches; the rest of the picture was pure pre-conquest. It was as far from the center of San Sebastián as San Sebastián, Spain, is from Bali; for the un-Puritanical costume makes the comparison with Bali inevitable.

The endless pictorial interest of this place could never grow monotonous to Nordic eyes. It would be shocking to see a comely young woman, unclothed but for a bright-striped cloth wrapped about her thighs, walking down Fifth Avenue with a naked baby held to her milk-distended breast, but here this natural and beautiful sight evokes no stares. A *virginita* follows her mother, leaning far to one side to balance the weight of a baby almost as big as herself, which she is carrying on her hip like a grown-up. The baby's riding days will soon be over, and he may never know any other form of locomotion than his own feet for the rest of his life.

There is no hurry and no idleness. Life has a slow, rhythmic, unwearied tempo. But the tropics as a land of lotus-eaters is purely a white man's vision.

Women came up from the stream carrying baskets of sweet-smelling, stone-scrubbed wash on their heads. They hung it in bright patches on the bushes in the sun. From the nearest ranchos came the pat-pat-patting of hands making *tortillas*. Into the street came a young girl with hips of an hermaphroditic slimness, as graceful as a snake standing on its tail. Across the street, a woman laid a *petate* on the hard sand and spread upon it some red chili. As she stooped to her task, her fleshy polished back revealed a thousand charming curves, and her breast, pressed between thigh and thorax, swelled like a ripe peach about to burst its skin. Near-by sat a little boy with a belly as big as a budget, eating dirt, as children will the world over.

As the sun assumed the vertical, the shadow curled up at the foot of the trees and bushes, and every detail took on robust form and color. Of the women who passed to and fro, few were ugly and even the ugly ones had that unmatchable grace of carriage which comes from balancing objects upon the head from

childhood. For the most part, these women, with their ebony hair, marvelous orange-tinted skin, roundness of arm, smallness of foot, and daintiness of hand, had the splendor of exquisite health, which made them seem beautiful. They are daughters of the sun, in whose bodies are united voluptuousness and strength, rich lines, satiny gloss and transparent tone with firm, compact thighs, smooth limbs, and supple, muscular loins.

I worship beauty of form above all things. But beauty is born, not made; a flower that cannot be sown, a pure gift of heaven. The eternal Evelike beauty that does not outmode is never found in civilized cities, but in the far corners of the world where civilization has not yet spread.

Life in Guatemala is always pictorial and invariably a picture that tells a story. It is a subject for the healthy brush of a Rubens and not that of artists who wade in "the sickly surf of symbolism."

I painted all day, pausing only long enough to eat a banana and drink the cool, sweet liquid of a water coconut. Then, when the evening shadows grew long, I went back to the plaza to await Don Conrado.

The sun was setting as it sets only in the tropics. The volcanoes and the jagged mountains flanking them took on unimaginable hues; the cliffs and crests caught the fabulous rosy light, and the clouds of smoke and mist that rested wearily upon the green pillow of the hills were shot through with rainbow gleams. In the enormous crater of Santa Maria and in all the seams and sinews of the mountains were deep blue shadows. The mountains seemed clothed in changeable silk; but, *poco a poco*, the resplendent colors died away, melting into purple half-tones, shadows invaded the lower slopes, the light withdrew to the higher summits and the valley sank in gloom. At last only the golden crown of Santa Maria sparkled in the serene sky with the parting kiss of the sun.

## XIX

### Trailing Tonatio

**I**N 1524 PEDRO DE ALVARADO, at the head of only four hundred and thirty-five Spaniards and about three hundred Indian allies, rode down from Mexico and audaciously demanded of some six million Indians, who had never before seen a bearded white man, that they give up their own sovereignty, stop the practice of sodomy and human sacrifice, and acknowledge Catholicism and the Spanish Crown. The bewildered Indians were advised to do so peaceably or else...

They already knew what that meant.

They knew that the mild-looking, cheerful-countenanced Alvarado, whom the Mexicans called "Tonatio," or "The Sun," was the most cruel and ruthless of all the godlike mounted men who claimed their lands in the name of a far-off monarch.

Tecúm Umán, king of the Quichés, whose mountain-walled territory lay first in the Spanish line of march, in politest Quiché told the emissaries of Alvarado to get out, and prepared to defend the narrow pass to Quezaltenango.

Undaunted, Alvarado and his followers dragged their four pieces of cannon up the precipitous trail between the volcanic peaks of Santa Maria and Zunil to meet the Indian hordes.

And now, four hundred years later, with Don Conrado, Arnold, and a rheumatic old descendant of those Mayas named

Nayo, I was riding comfortably in a new model American sedan over the route by which the first white men entered Guatemala.

The Sunday before I had, in bitter sweat, toiled up the Indian trail as far as San Felipe. As the Indian travels, the hard but direct way, this was perhaps a third of the distance to the summit of the pass. The trail was nearly perpendicular, and full of short zigzags, the footing made doubly precarious by the overnight rains.

Conrad, who climbed up with me along with an antlike file of Indians, said he would not think of taking a horse over such a trail. For every two steps forward we slipped back one. The sharp stones sliced the heel off one of Conrad's shoes.

Yet among the Indians was an old man from Buena Vista who moved with slow but unflagging step. He was all of eighty, withered to the bone, an animated skeleton. I expressed astonishment that he should even attempt a climb that strained young legs.

"That old fellow's a fooler," Conrad said. "Last month he married a young woman. Shortly afterward he complained to my father that she was being unfaithful to him. 'What did you expect?' my father asked him. 'Did you think an old man like you could satisfy a woman so much younger?' The old boy resented the suggestion that he was getting senile. 'You wrong me, *patrón*,' he said. 'My wife left me only because she was angry at my keeping another woman!'"

On the trail we saw a drunken Indian woman with a large wooden cross balanced on her head. Perhaps her husband had just died, and, still drunk from the wake, she was taking the cross to place on his grave. In spite of her tipsy weaving, her amazing instinct for balance kept the cross in place.

In the market at San Felipe we again saw our old man from Buena Vista. He had come, not to buy or to sell, but purely for the fun of seeing the life and color of the plaza and of talking with old friends and strangers. He told us that a young Indian man had slipped on the trail and fallen to his death. He made the Indian gesture of the hand to indicate that the fellow had been drinking.

Now I was in San Felipe again, having come the easy way by car. Not wholly easy, either, as just outside of town a tire blew

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out. We were carrying a flat spare, and I had done my stint at the hand pump. In San Felipe we found a blacksmith to dismount the tire and patch the tube. This consumed an hour or so. But at last we were again on the road, which winds steeply up from the hot coastland into the chill, cloudy mountains. We were in second or first gear most of the way.

The view of the coast, which I can well believe must grow more inspiring with the altitude, was completely obscured by the sleety mists which filled the valley.

Our road crossed and recrossed the abandoned electric railway between San Felipe and Quezaltenango, which cost Guatemala some seven millions of dollars. It is said to have the steepest grades of any railroad in the world, for which reason it was condemned as unsafe after only a few months' operation. The steel bridges which span the deep barrancas are set on rockers to make them earthquake proof, and these expensive structures are now used as causeways by the Indians.

We stopped at Aguas Amargas to leave old Nayo. The faithful house servant was suffering from sciatica, which the hot mineral baths are said to cure. The waters, which taste like hot limeade, are piped through bamboo stalks to wooden and stone bathtubs. There was a communal bath for the Indians, and we could hear splashing and the treble voices and laughter of the women from within.

We put on our coats, as the air had acquired an edge, the altitude being about seven thousand feet above the steaming coast. But these cold highlands were steaming, too; not from the heat of the sun, however, but from subterranean fires. On every hand we saw countless *fumarolas*—hot springs and steam geysers gushing from the volcanic bosoms.

We passed through the interesting Indian village of Zunil where there are also famous curative baths, and further along the road we stopped to inspect the baths at Almalonga. Some of the sunken bathtubs were large enough to swim in. Later I came back and did so, and found the water deliciously warm as it gushed directly from the mountainside in a never-ending flow. There were rooms, restaurant, and bar in connection with the baths. At the bar we had a heavy aphrodisiac concoction of egg yolks and rum, called *ronpopo*.

Before the days of automobiles, Don Conrado used to ride up to Quezaltenango. One time a sheep on the mountainside above dislodged a stone which, striking him on the forehead, knocked him unconscious from his horse, and he lay in the road bleeding, until help came.

He pointed out the place where the accident occurred as we passed it, and looking up the precipitous bank, I wondered that the Quiché warriors had not taken advantage of these rugged heights to attack the Spanish column with rocks, lances, and arrows hurled from above, instead of waiting to meet their enemy, bravely but foolishly, in the open.

It was near here that the Spaniards met a fat Indian *bruja* sacrificing one of the barkless dogs raised for meat, as a signal of hostility. Shortly after, they were set upon by an advance guard of over six thousand Indians sent to hold the pass.

With bloodcurdling yells, hisses, and cries, demoniac drumming and wild blasts from conch shell trumpets, the painted Indians, with feathered helmets and shields of turtle shell and jaguar hide, attacked fiercely. Obsidian-tipped arrows, javelins, lances, and stones flew thick in the air. They fought the Spaniards foot to foot, returning thrusts of steel with blows of wooden swords edged with volcanic glass. Three or four would seize a horse before and behind and try to drag it to earth.

The Spaniards fought in close formation, presenting a wall of steel to their adversaries. They had cannon, arquebuses, crossbows, steel swords, and lances. And they had defensive armor that the arrows and the darts from the blow guns could not pierce. Six-to-one was easy odds. Crying "Charge, Spain!" the Spaniards spurred their terror-striking horses against the Indians, and these fiery beasts with their armor-clad riders completely demoralized the rank and file of the Indian host. Many believed that horse and rider were one supernatural being, godlike, invulnerable. Others said that the Spaniards were sons of the ancient god Kukulkan, whom legends foretold would return one day to rule.

With superiority of arms and the superstitious beliefs of the aborigines in favor of the conquistadors, the result was a complete rout of the Indians.

Alvarado rested his men for three days, after which he led

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them on to Quezaltenango, where they were opposed by sixteen thousand Quiché warriors. Withdrawing to a plain where the cavalry would have free action, the Spaniards again defeated the Indians, with such loss that for a long time after the latter remained completely in awe of the white men.

Thus began the conquest of Guatemala.

"The mind sickens," says Henry Dunn, "at following the bloody track of these remorseless conquerors."

And Bartolomé de las Casas cries:

"Alvarado and his brothers, together with others, have killed more than four or five million people in the fifteen or sixteen years from the year 1524 until 1540, and they continue to kill and destroy those who are still left. They have destroyed and devastated a kingdom more than one hundred leagues square, one of the happiest in the way of fertility and population in the world.

"It was his (Alvarado's) custom when he went to make war on some town or province to take with him as many of the Indians as he could to fight against the others, and as he led ten thousand to twenty thousand and gave them nothing to eat, he allowed them to eat the Indians they captured, and so a solemn butchery of human flesh took place in his army, where in his presence children were killed and roasted. They would kill a man only to eat his hands and feet, which were considered the best bits."

What were these people like whom the Spaniards conquered in their greed for gold, glory, slaves, and souls?

Archeologists tell us that Mayan civilization was superior in many respects to that of the rest of the world at the beginning of the Christian era. Unique architectural forms and advanced calendrical and astronomical systems prove conclusively that the Mayas developed independently and could not have been indebted to Egypt or Asia for their culture.

The Maya nations did not form an Empire, but were divided into city-states as in ancient Greece, says Frans Blom.\* Each nation had its royal man and oldest son who succeeded him. The rulers lived in houses of stone and mortar with façades decorated with paintings. Sunshades of three tiers of colored

\* *The Conquest of Yucatan* by Frans Blom.



feathers were held over the thrones of the chiefs as a sign of rank.

The priesthood formed a power behind the throne. Their temples and idols were placed on top of high truncated pyramids of steps. The priests were the astronomers and mathematicians, the literate element. Only the sons of the nobles and priests were taught the divisions of the calendar, feast days and ceremonies, administration of sacraments, science of evil days and times, manner of prophesying happenings, remedies for evil things, ancient history, and the reading and writing of the characters in books.

When the Spaniards came, they found the Indians dressed somewhat as they dress today. The men wore jacket-like cotton shirts, loincloths, cloaks, and leather sandals; the women dressed in *guípiles* and wrap-around cloth skirts, while the priests had long white cotton cloaks reaching to the feet and long hair stiffened to a solid mass by applications of sacrificial blood. Soldiers wore feathered crests, quilted cotton armor reaching to the knees, and painted their faces black, white, and red.

Common people built their ranchos exactly as they do today. According to the climate, the walls were made of corn, cane, or bamboo stalks, or of wattle plastered with mud and white-washed with lime. Roofs were high-pitched to shed the rain and thatched with palm or grass.

Men were merchants, farmers, hunters, and house builders. Each man had his milpa upon which to raise his quota of *maíz*. Mayan civilization rested upon a basis of *maíz* and lime.

The women wove, made pottery, bore children and cared for them, fetched water, made *tortillas*, and marketed for supplies.

Marriage was arranged by the parents, the son's father making an offer of gifts to the parents of the girl. A price was set according to the girl's talents and beauty. If, after two years of marriage, the girl failed to give birth, the husband could return her to her parents and reclaim her purchase price, or sell her. Barren women often became prostitutes. Adultery was severely punished, and the penalty for raping a virgin or forcing a married woman was death.

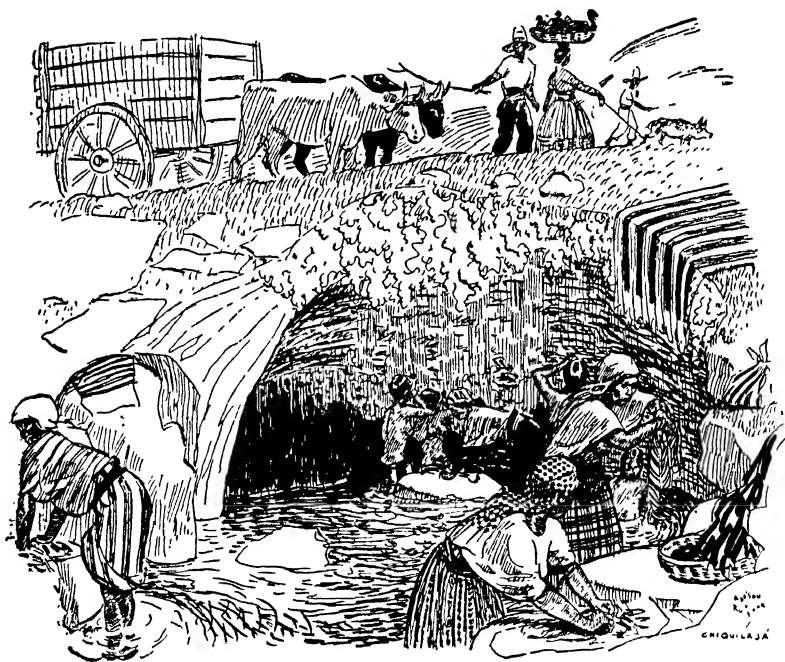
The Mayas had no set burial customs. Often the dead were cremated and their ashes placed in burial urns, and since the

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Indians believe that any object made by man possesses life, the urns were "killed" by punching a hole in the side.

Relief from drudgery was supplied by games, gambling, dancing, and religion.

The art of building highways and temples and the science of reading the stars and the Maya characters is dead. The nobles and priests were killed, but in Guatemala today there are still two million Indians speaking Maya dialects. These descendants of pre-conquest merchant, farmer, and slave still live exactly as their fathers lived. And this is what makes Guatemala so endlessly interesting and picturesque.



XX  
People  
Called  
Sheep

**I**N QUEZALTENANGO Don Conrado drove me to my native pension. Standing at the curb was the McBryde's yellow coupe, and when I went in to register I learned from *Señor B.*, the hotel owner, that Van and Web had arrived the day before; a singular coincidence, for when we parted on Lake Atitlán at the end of June, we had planned to meet again in Quezaltenango "during the August canicula"—certainly not a very specific date. *Señor B.* said that they had stepped out, but would be back shortly.

The hotel, which stands on a steep hill, is built around an open patio, a style of architecture admirably suited to lower altitudes, but hardly the thing in the blood-congealing *altos*.

*Señor B.* was very proud of his pension. He pointed to the flower-filled patio, took me to the dining room, and then, fairly bursting with pride, showed me the *baño*. Ah, the *baño*! "*Mire, señor; qué limpio!*" How clean, indeed! Beside the toilet seat was a box filled with soiled toilet paper, plumbing being such a novelty that the natives have not learned its full uses. A pane of the glass door had been broken and left unrepaired, probably because the servants found the larger opening more serviceable than the keyhole for observing whether or not the *baño* was occupied.

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This peeping habit is rather astonishing at first. Once a friend of mine, wishing to take a bath, summoned the room boy and asked if the *baño* were free.

"I'll see," said the boy.

Off he went and came back with the report, "The *baño* is occupied, but will be free in a minute, *señor*."

A moment later my friend's wife came out.

A Guatemalan servant never enters your room without asking "*Con permiso*"—"With your permission"—but, unless the door is locked, he or she always enters first.

Once I was standing naked in front of my mirror trying to solve the mystery of putting on a San Sebastián *corte* I had bought when the maid servant came in unannounced. I thought her "*Con permiso, señor*" decidedly tardy.

When the McBrydes came in, I introduced them to Don Conrado, who took us to the German Club, where we saw the memorial plaque to the seven German youths who were massacred some years ago by the savage Indians of Pie de Volcán upon the suspicion of having tampered with their idols.

Every day I went with the McBrydes to whatever village had the most interesting market. While Web collected scientific data, Van and I would sketch.

The first town we went to was San Francisco el Alto. All through the mountains we saw wandering herdsmen with their great flocks of black and white sheep, eternally on the move to find the best grazing grounds. For in the vast valley of La Pedrera in which Quezaltenango lies, and in the surrounding mountains, centers the wool-raising and blanket-weaving industry. From this fact comes the nickname *Chivos*, or Sheep, given to natives of the region.

We observed the economical manner in which the Indians manure their milpas by means of a walking sheep pen.

The market of San Francisco el Alto was overwhelming. The immense plaza was so densely peopled that in order to make a sketch I had to climb up into the bandstand whence I could look out over the heads of the crowd. I afterward visited the animal market, which is held on a hill outside the town, and is the largest and most remarkable of its kind. I went about sniping picturesque details. Among my sketches is a woman with a big sow, both nursing their young.

We called on Padre Carlos Knittle, admired the magnificent view from his convent balcony, as well as the famous fresco of St. Francis discovered intact under subsequent layers of paint, and had a nip of Scotch and a very pleasant chat before returning to Quezaltenango.

Another day we visited Momostenango, which lies seven miles beyond San Francisco el Alto over a rough chain of hills. The narrow streets of the village were so densely thronged we could scarcely get through, and as we crept toward the plaza, the car was surrounded by the most ghoulish looking characters imaginable. They were dressed in tatters and had wild matted manes of tawny hair, while their faces were covered by ferocious masks set at unnatural angles. They hopped and wove drunkenly around the car on feet encased in American shoe leather, from time to time cracking their long black bull whips like pistol shots.

We were obliged to stop in a side street about a block from the plaza, being unable to proceed further through the lively jam. The wild men shook their heads mockingly through the windows at us and then danced off to join a procession which with thump-thump, boom, and whistle of marimba, fife, and drum, made its appearance in the cross street ahead. Then we learned that we had arrived during a fiesta which was in its fourth day.

Above the heads of the bright crowd, we saw bobbing by the life-size figures of the saints, with doll faces, real hair, and resplendent robes. Getting out of the car, we wedged our way through the wall of Indians and saw the Buddha-faced *cofrades* in their finest trappings, while upon their heels came a group of maskers even more outlandish than the wild men: comic fantasies of seventeenth century courtiers, decked out in cockaded hats, capes of brocade and velvet, puffed sleeves, slashed breeches, Spanish lace, Guatemalan feathers, and American shoes. Their faces were covered by livid white masks with pink cheeks and curling gilt mustaches and beards affixed at breakneck angles. From their swords and the little bits of mirror ornamenting the costumes flashed blinding gleams of sunlight.

The clownish wild men ran about, hopping up and down and cracking their whips, but I could discern neither wonder nor amusement upon the impassive faces of the onlookers.

When the marchers had completed the circuit of the village, the saints were reinstalled in the church at the head of the big plaza, and the fiesta became a kind of three-ring circus. In the middle of the plaza were three tall wooden platforms, upon which the storytellers and orators held forth, but as it was impossible to get near them through the dense crowd, I edged around the outside and stood in the doorway of a *tienda*.

Before me, in a hollow square, the wild men were performing a sadistic-masochistic ritual dance, in which first one, and then the other, submitted to his opponent's lash. The one who received the lash stood with arms raised while the long black whip struck like a snake and coiled around his middle. He then jiggled free and struck back. Though I watched for a long time, none of the dancers showed the least sign of faltering either from pain or fatigue.

An inebriated celebrant swayed toward me from the line of passers-by.

"*Regaleme un cigarillo, señor,*" he begged, but his wife snatched him back before I could make him a "present" of the cigarette.

I then went to view the third ring of the show, around the corner from the plaza in the street running past the arcaded municipal building, where I found my comic cavaliers. The street slanted up to the top of a hill where were assembled half the maskers mounted bareback on unbridled ponies, while the others were lined up at the foot of the street. Marimba, fife, and drum gave the mimes their tuneless cue, and they advanced to meet each other; those on foot lifting their knees in a wooden rhythm, those mounted clattering down the hill with assistants hanging to the ponies' halters. The former were led by a man in a high plumed headdress holding a feathered wand, the latter by a rider in a cockaded tricorne who held an unsheathed sword. While all the others were dressed virtually alike, it was plain that one group represented the Quichés under Tecúm-Umán, and the other the Spaniards with Alvarado at their head. This, then, was the famous Dance of the Conquistadors, by which the Indians—cockeyed as it may seem—commemorate their own downfall.

When the opposing "armies" met, they brandished their wands and weapons at each other and then turned and beat a

disorderly retreat to their original positions. Advance and retreat—that was the dull pattern of the dance. It continued mechanically, hypnotically, without variation except for such minor irregularities as a drunk running out and falling beneath the ponies' heels.

I stood sketching among the stoical watchers who squatted along the curb. Suddenly plop, plop, plop! big rain drops began to fall, spotting the cobbled street like a jaguar's skin. But as if prepared for any emergency, black umbrellas were rushed to the performers, and the dance went weirdly on until it commenced to rain *a cántaros* or pitchers full, as the Spaniards say, and everybody including myself, ducked for shelter. I stood squeezed in a crowd of Indians under the arcade of the town hall until the storm abated, when I rejoined Van and Web.

We drove through the rain-cleared streets out into the pine-clad hills about three miles beyond the town, where we picnicked beneath the trees. The sun had come out brightly again, and as if by a miracle all the effects of the rain had disappeared. Below us was a deep wooded barranca and we could faintly hear the brawling of a stream and catch silvery flashes between the spaces of forest green. A footpath much used by the Indians slithered downward through the rocks and trees, and when we had finished eating we went down to have a look-see.

I recalled having been told of the mixed bathing in Momostenango, so I was not taken by surprise, on our coming out upon a ledge of rock some fifty feet above the river, to see below us a pool in the rocks seething with the brown bodies of men, women, and children. It was, however, a much stranger scene than I had anticipated. For the Indians come here not only to bathe but also to wash, stretch, and tread their wool blankets before offering them for sale in the market. We saw at least a dozen men stretching the wet blankets and treading them with tireless bare feet. Rivulets of indigo dye from the blankets ran down into the bathing pool, tinturing the water a dark blue, and it was diverting to see the Indians go into the pool a golden brown and emerge a half-hour later a fanciful mulberry color.

The bathers paid little attention to us. True, the men kept themselves covered with one hand, but this they do even among



themselves; the presence of women and girls, and particularly a white woman, had nothing to do with it. The only bashfulness we observed was quite properly displayed by maidens of the age of puberty who cast many timorous and hesitating glances at us before pulling their bright *guipiles* off over their heads. They removed their *cortes* close by the pool and then slipped hastily into the water. But the older women appeared indifferent to the gaze of Nordic eyes. With all the sensuous enjoyment of odalisques in a Turkish bath, they luxuriated in the purply waters of the pool. Some shampooed their blue-black hair, others interminably soaped their beautiful golden bodies, while those who had finished their ablutions stretched or turned idly in the water like South Sea sylphids. One young mother, who believed in killing two birds with one stone, sat at the pool's edge with her baby across her knees, bathing him and suckling him at the same time.

When we returned to Momostenango, the fiesta was again in full swing. In that great crowd milling about in the plaza—



lonely mountain folk drawn to the fiesta by the age-old craving for light, color, music, and dancing—there was no end to the variety and beauty of costume nor to the wealth of picturesque detail; I filled my notebook with sketches. It was an utterly foreign scene, except for one familiar Coney Island touch—an ice cream vender encircled by wistful-eyed, empty-pursed boys and girls.

Toward evening, Padre Francisco Knittle, brother of the priest of San Francisco el Alto, kindly invited us to the convent for cake and coffee with himself and his sister. As we passed a side entrance to the church, we saw a sight so strange we wondered whether we were dreaming—a pagan dance within a Christian temple! It seemed that when the heavy downpour broke up the Dance of the Conquistadors, the maskers had taken shelter in the church. And here, surrounded by a dark circle of spectators, they still were, hypnotically advancing and retreating, accompanied by weird candle-flung shadows. Padre Knittle said wearily that they would keep it up all night.

From the standpoint of color and diversity of amazing costumes, the big Sunday market at San Juan Ostuncalco is unrivaled. It draws venders from an immense region of which it is the natural focal center. They come up from the glistening white sand hills of San Martin Chili Verde and down from the dark pine country around San Pedro and San Marcos. The plaza blazes with one-hundred-proof reds, yellows, and blues that inebriate the eye with color. Not often do the costumes of the men rival those of the women, but here they do. Easily the most stunning objects in this colorful bazaar are the Chili Verde men. According to whether their tunic is black or white, they resemble romantic monks or Sheiks of Araby. Their sleeves are richly embroidered in blue and red, they wear dashing embroidered red sashes, and tie about their heads scarlet scarves with flowing ends. But why, oh why, will some of them top off this perfect costume with a silly little black felt hat!

There being not an inch of space left for an artist amid this throng of venders, I sat for a time in the car, which was parked at a corner of the plaza, and made group studies, which were

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later bought by Frans Blom for the Museum of Middle American Research, Tulane University, New Orleans.

One of the least interesting markets we visited was that of Cantel, and I only mention going there because of one or two amusing and curious items: a woman with a trussed-up turkey balanced upon her head; a boy carrying a black sheep on his back while his father walked behind merely holding the animal's tail; and a woman with a goiter bigger than her head.

Progress had come to Cantel in the form of a loud speaker in the plaza, which was blazing forth *La Musica Gira*, *Gira*, broadcast from Mexico City. The McBrydes asked me if the tune was known in the United States and wondered why I almost exploded. Having heard it only in Spanish, they thought "The Music Goes Round and Round" was a Mexican piece.

In Cantel, we saw many merchants from Nahualá, a town on the *boca costa*. They were recognizable by their flat-crowned, broad-brimmed, varnished black straw hats, short jackets and checked *rodilleras*. The Chamcatal Indians of Santa Catarina Ixtaguacán, Santo Tomás Perdido, and Nahualá have always been the most independent tribe in Guatemala. They paid tribute to Alvarado to keep their lands from being invaded, and large sums to every succeeding government to prevent the enforced sale of liquor within their boundaries, and now, I was told, have purchased their autonomy from the present government. Proud of the purity of their race, they permit no white man to spend the night in their little *caciquedom*.

I have perhaps said too little about Quezaltenango itself. As it was the base from which we went forth to explore the surrounding country, we may have been inclined to think of it in comparison with the picturesque Indian villages as a prosaic modern city, which it is far from being.

Quezaltenango, the second city of Guatemala, is more Latin, more Indian, and more picturesque than the capital. Its heart is the beautiful Plaza Centro Americana, with its bandstand and tall column crowned by a statue of Justo Rufino Barrios, Guatemala's great reform president, who died battling for a Central American union. The buildings surrounding the plaza possess

little interest except for the earthquake-racked old cathedral—the one touch of beauty. Whenever Web or myself appeared in the plaza, the Indian bootblacks would cry "*schuputz*," the only foreign words they knew being German.

The streets of Quezaltenango are angled and tortuous with narrow sidewalks and jutting window grilles into which, if we didn't watch out, we were continually bumping. From the roof of our pension I could look out over the roofs of the city upon fecund fields and around at the marching volcanoes with clouds tearing across their spuming summits, giving an impression of violent movement.

One of the old world customs to which Quezaltenango clings is that of the nightly band concert in the plaza. Marimba and brass play on alternate nights, while the women stroll clockwise and the men counter clockwise ogling one another as they pass. Every night after dinner we too did our stint around the plaza, but we walked briskly in the street where there was nothing to hinder our speed; for we were out not to ogle or to be ogled, but to keep warm.

But what saved us from congealing was the padre's bottle. The McBrydes had bought a quart of whisky to take as a present to the priest of Chichicastenango, whom they were going to visit. One evening when we were sitting shivering in the tropic arctic cold, I proposed splitting the padre's bottle, if Web had no objection to buying another. It was a happy line of reasoning that not only preserved us from the equatorial chill but assured us of always having a quart on hand; for having violated the first bottle, the next seemed less sacred.

We came to know the market of Quezaltenango pretty thoroughly. It occupies a large roofless enclosure with roofed-over aisles for the venders, and was the one place in the sleepy city that was filled with hum and movement. I enjoyed wandering through the bright stalls redolent of gardenias, honeysuckle, and carnations and the heavy honey odor of overripe tropical fruits, with which mingled the acrid smell of smoke and the stench of pork grease from the open-air restaurants. And I liked to look at the little Indian women, so much prettier, plumper, and rosier than their Quiché sisters of Chichicastenango. Their pudginess is accentuated by their kimono-sleeved *guipiles* and full, swaying

skirts made from eight and a half yards of goods and reaching almost to the ground. They walk with an undulating grace; their manner of wearing their long striped *rebosos* wound about their bodies makes them look like lady Laocoöns.

One day we set out for Pie de Volcán. I do not say we *went* to Pie de Volcán, because I have always felt dissatisfied with the results of this day's quest, although Web held, and I suppose still holds, that we saw all there was to see of this wild village at the foot, as its name implies, of the volcano of Santa Maria.

We had considerable curiosity about this benighted place, whose savage citizens had butchered seven young German mountain climbers. These, having been overtaken by night in the vicinity of Pie de Volcán, had sought refuge in a cave sacred to the Indians' bloody gods. It is said that these Indians are the wildest yet to be found in Guatemala and that they still practice *brujeria* in mountain caves haunted by the Sombrerón and filled with vampire bats and human skulls.

We hoped to meet with some strange adventure in such a place, and this hope seemed likely of realization when we turned off the main highway and began following ungraded roads as confused as skeins of thread through a wild moorland covered with *pajón*, that coarse Guatemalan grass which the natives use for thatch and from whose roots our best brooms are made. It was a lowering, depressing day, quite in keeping with the dreary desolation of that desert region.

There are few roads so bad a four-cylinder Ford cannot negotiate them, but when we left the rolling moors and chugged along the stony byways that snaked through the wild brushwood up the steep mountain slope, we at length came to such an impasse. The barking of dogs announced an Indian habitation near at hand, and getting out of the car and following a lane in the direction of the sounds, we came to the barred gate of a compound in which were two mean ranchos of cornstalks and *pajón*, as filthy as pig sties. A slatternly old hag and a very unprepossessing younger woman, who were feeding some lean pigs in the stinking muddy yard, fled to the nearest hut at our approach, and the dogs bristled and growled on the other side of the gate. The women peered at us from the darkness of the doorway, not

even reassured by the presence of Van, perhaps because she was wearing mannish jodphurs.

"Where is Pie de Volcán?" asked Web.

"Here."

"But, where is the center?"

The hag gave the direction with a wave of the hand. But though we scoured the countryside we found no more than a few isolated ranchos as mean as the ones we had first seen. At the end of our morning's search we encountered a wandering shepherd, of whom we again inquired where we could find the civic center of Pie de Volcán.

"*Aquí no más*—right here," said the man, indicating with an inclusive wave of the hand the bleak moors and the wild woods with only an occasional grass roof showing.

He may have been right, but I should say that a man who could say that so much undeveloped territory was the thriving heart of his village had missed his calling—he should have been a Los Angeles realtor.

At last the *canicula*, that pause in the rains, came to an end, and I decided to wait out the rainy season in the capital. So one bright morning in mid-August the McBrydes drove me out to the airport, where I bade them good-by with a heart that was almost heavy enough to keep the plane from taking off.



## XXI

### Art Spirit

**T**HE FIVE PLACE TACA monoplane swooped in a graceful curve up and up until the McBrydes were tiny black specks and their car a yellow beetle; then I lost sight of them altogether. The plane straightened out and we saw eye to eye with the cloudy craters of the volcanoes.

I sat in the front seat next to the pilot, too close to the whirr and vibration of the propellers for comfort. Looking down, I saw the earth lying preternaturally still six thousand feet below, while I had the sensation of being catapulted through space on the edge of nothing. It was my first flight and I admit to feeling nervous, but I had only to glance at the phlegmatic pilot slumped over his stick and looking as bored as a streetcar conductor, to make me realize that air travel has become a commonplace, even in a land where the roads are still untamed.

I soon became preoccupied in gazing at the frozen landscape, like a painting unrolled upon an immense table and glazed with pellucid light. I tried to identify the little towns, all so much alike with their red tile roofs, central plaza, and pearl-like church. They were strung on an ocherish filament that wavered across the patterned greens of corn and cane fields. Now and again I descried a beetle-like object crawling along the thread-thin path—a bus that would take seven hours to make the same

trip we were making in thirty-five minutes. Our shadow skimmed like a wild bird across the ground, and then floated for a moment over the unsoundable blue of Lake Atitlán, lying quietly in its lava cup. One moment our silver wing was scraping the purple cones of San Pedro, Atitlán, and Tolimán, the next those of Acatenango, Fuego, and Agua, with Antigua spread beneath, a tawny mosaic of cloistered ruin. Then we were bumping on the rough air currents through a narrow mountain pass, and glimpsing the white capital gleaming on the green valley floor ahead. We descended like a deflating tire and landed happily at beautiful Aurora airport, deaf, dizzy, and delighted.

Up to now I had been a traveler in a strange land, but suddenly I found myself living in an established way with a host of friends and acquaintances. So many callers came to see my paintings that it became a problem to find time for further work. *El Imparcial*, the leading daily, published four of my pictures with a long front page news story about my work in Guatemala.

I came to know many native artists through *Señor* Delfino Sanchez Latour, the chief of protocol. Calling upon him at the ministry shortly after my return to the capital, he expressed a wish to see my paintings; and we were on the way to my hotel in his car when he suddenly told his chauffeur to stop and hailed a man with thick glasses and a black fedora.

"I want you to meet Fritz Schaeffer, one of our best etchers and painters," said *Señor* Latour when the man got in beside us.

And thus began what is so rare in a foreign country—a true friendship. And it was not long before I knew most of the leading artists, writers, musicians, and friends of art in Guatemala City.

Through public notice and by word of mouth, my reputation spread and the demand to see my work became somewhat embarrassing. Director Rafaël Yela Günther invited me to exhibit at the National Academy of Fine Arts, but I asked for a rain check in view of the fact that I expected to be in the country so many more months. Yela Günther is a most remarkable sculptor. He is a frail little man, but his work is big and powerful and based on a vigorous imagination, and I always delighted in going to his studio. His most important piece was a figure of the Christ

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crucified, with the head turned up instead of down. On the lips seemed to tremble the supplication: "Forgive them, Father; for they know not what they do."

There are many talented artists in Guatemala. Most of them have to support themselves and their families by other means than art. Fritz Schaeffer keeps the books of the Lanquetin Drug Store; Antonio Tejeda makes archeological copies for the Carnegie Institute; Jaime Arimany is a printer and stationer; Hilario Arathoon works in the Sun Insurance office; Ovidio Rodas Corso is a staff photographer on *El Imparcial*; Carmen Pettersen devotes herself to educating her daughter on her husband's coffee *finca*. Only two painters live by their art—Garavito and Carlos Merida—and Merida has gone to live in Mexico.

Until the government turned over an old palace in Eighth Avenue to the National Academy, the classes were held in Fritz Schaeffer's own home. Such a wonderful spirit cannot be defeated, because it knows not defeat.

I often went to the Academy to draw from the costume or the nude. Here the fires of art are tended amid the subdued and faded glories of old salons where deep, Spanish tiled window seats evoke romantic visions of pretty *señoritas* and guitar-playing cavalier lovers watched over, regardless of the wrought-iron window grilles, by cat-eyed duennas. And now how those same stern duennas would blush under their black lace mantillas could they see a model standing in shameless nudity where once may have stood a sacred statue!

Our life model had not a pretty face, but it was her only lack; her body was beautiful. If you mentally decapitated her, she might have been the Venus de Milo, with arms. She was a life model almost literally speaking, inasmuch as pretty girls willing to pose nude were scarce, and the job was hers for as long as she chose to keep it or could keep her figure. It meant, of course, that the students had to study week in and week out from the same set of facts, but it was a good deal that those facts were worth studying.

The model in Tejeda's costume class was a beautiful Indian girl from flowery San Pedro Sacatepequez with the flowery name Toribia. She was a good model but a bad girl. One day her sister



came to take her place. Toribia, as the saying goes, had gone off "to make *tortillas* for her Chepe."

Although the rainy season was at its height and every evening the streets of the capital ran rivers and had to be crossed by temporary footbridges, I had many clear mornings for painting outdoors. Every Sunday that promised fair I went to some outlying Indian village with a group of native artists. Fritz and his athletic young protégé, Carlos Arenas, would make the arrangements. If we could go by bus, we did so; if not, we hired cars and split the cost as many ways as there were members of our party.

Mrs. Schaeffer and the two children invariably accompanied us to allay the suspicions of the wary Indian women. It was a good idea. Later, when my wife joined me, I found it always much easier to gain the Indians' confidence when she was present.

We frequently went to Mixco, not because we found the village itself interesting, but because of a certain place on the Rio Pensalic about a mile and half out of town where the Indians went to wash and bathe and fill their *tinajas* from a diamond-clear spring. All the people of the town at one time or another came to this spot: old women with dried up throats, mothers weary of child bearing but about to become mothers again, young women with an airy step, sleek youths, boys and girls and carried babies, men with water carts drawn by thick-necked oxen, and ladina school girls with picnic baskets, bathing gowns, and chaperones.

I was reminded of those scenes from African films in which all the wild life of the jungle comes to the common watering hole, and I wondered if some primitive instinct of the Indians might not find satisfaction in coming to the communal spring. I recalled that the Indians of Chichicastenango had held out against the water being piped into the town. The Indians oppose all labor-saving devices, and from their own standpoint maybe they are right. They live in a timeless, but busy world; their activities are as much a part of their nature as those of the bees. And everything that is made easier for them brings the fatal consequence of an atrophied instinct.

The Indian women of Mixco, who think nothing of trotting

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twenty miles to the capital and back to sell a few cents' worth of *tortillas*, naturally think still less of walking three miles to fetch a gallon or two of water. And so they come all day long down to the ancient spring by the Pensalic.

One day, having observed a frog and a snake in the spring, we were solemnly told by an old Indian woman that they were its sacred guardians and that if any ill befell them the waters would cease to flow.

We had an opportunity to check this quaint superstition that afternoon when a sudden squall forced us to take shelter in a rancho where an Indian woman was making cigarettes with a minimum of native tobacco rolled in cornhusk wrappers which she first polished with a round stone. She affirmed the legend and added that, only a short while ago, a man who had killed a frog was put in jail for three days while it was determined whether the co-guardian of the spring was safe. In the meantime, the frog's body was held as a *corpus delicti*!

It would take too much space to mention more than a few of the many interesting places within a stone's throw of the capital. A half-hour's drive to the south brings you to beautiful Lake Amatitlán, society's playground; a few minutes more at the wheel, and you come to the colorful Indian village of Palín, about which I will have a good deal to say in a later chapter. Below Palín the drop to the coast is sudden and you quickly find yourself in the semi-tropics, where there are many fine coffee and cane *fincas*, notably that of the president and the beautiful property of the power and light company, San Luis, with its fine vistas and falls. The heat, when you reach Escuintla, is suffocating, but there are some famous baths, stocked with fishes to keep the water pure, in which to cool off. Puerto San José is not much farther, but both times that I planned to go there it was under several feet of water from the rains. I drove one day from the capital to Palín and then over the shoulder of Volcán de Agua through the interesting Indian town of Santa Maria de Jesus to Antigua and so on home, a circuit full of scenic delights. Chintautla, from which some of the finest native pottery comes, is within walking distance of Guatemala City.

Then, perched seven thousand feet high in the mountains northwest of the city and reached by a road as full of dangerous curves as a beautiful woman, you will find San Pedro and San Juan Sacatepequez, embalmed in perfume from the surrounding flower fields. Of the two villages, San Juan is the more picturesque, but the costumes of both are among the most gorgeous in the land and fairly reel with color.

San Juan's market is held on a ledge overlooking a barranca whose green-cloaked slopes are patterned by flower gardens and the red roofs and white walls of ranchos. The venders are shielded from the sun by a leaf-covered lattice, which fills the *plazuela* with shadows intersected with furtive glimmerings. When I entered the market with my paintbox, the woman tax-collector stopped me and asked what I had to sell.

The women are very shy and careful of their virtue. Marriage, though it might be made without benefit of clergy, is held sacred. Mrs. Osborne in her interesting little book on Guatemalan textiles says that the pregnant women wear sharp obsidian points on their maternity belts, so that when one meets another their babies cannot leap from womb to womb, causing a prenatal mixup.

One day Don Alejandro Deutschmann, who is related by marriage to the Mirón family, drove Garavito, Fritz, and myself to La Concepcion Pixcayá, a Mirón *finca* a few miles beyond San Juan.

The *casa grande* is a beautiful century-and-a-half-old two-storied house of the romantic Spanish colonial period. Forming two sides of an enclosed courtyard, it has a gracious balconied portico and hospitable arched doorway. To have preserved the effect of its old world charm, we should have arrived on horseback or in a carriage. The car was a discordant note.

In the back patio is a handsome *pila* with finely patinaed stonework. We persuaded two pretty Indian girls to pose beside it in their fiesta finery, and painted all morning long.

Garavito, Guatemala's peak painter, is a short but stocky, very boyish looking man in his thirties, with fine brown eyes, broad forehead, and pompadour of thick wavy black hair. He paints rapidly and directly and with keen sensitivity to color. When his

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color goes badly, it makes him actively ill. He is a native of Quezaltenango. Dona Leonore Mezger knew him as a boy, and when I was at Buena Vista, she showed me a small oil Garavito had painted while in his early 'teens. It revealed great promise—a promise, which, abetted by some years of study in Mexico City, Paris, and in Spain under Sorolla, he continues to fulfill.

As the house is used by the family only during the dry season and was not staffed nor provisioned for guests, we had brought our own lunch and liquor. As a special treat for me, Garavito had included some real Quezaltenango *paches*—potato-meal tamales—which were, as the Guatemaltecos say, *muy sabrosos* (very delicious).

I met Tocsika Roach, who was, I believe, the first person to collect and market Indian weaving, at a reception at the American Legation. She is a large woman with a pallid complexion but robust mind and tongue. Her first words to me were:

"No, I don't want to see your paintings." (Mind you, I hadn't asked her to.) "Everybody keeps asking me if I've seen them. They say you're the first artist to paint the Indians the way they really are. Well, we've had some rare artists down here, I can tell you. One man painted the Indians with chocolate-colored skins—you know they're not chocolate-colored at all; whoever saw a chocolate-colored Indian?—and kinky black hair. All they needed was a fez. And another so-called artist—he was a cubist or something—drew our poor Indians with angular heads and features. So I've made up my mind never to look at any more paintings of Indians. But if you'd like to see my collection of native textiles—some of my prizes—call for me at my shop on Thursday afternoon and we'll go to the house."

At her home I looked at costumes from scores of different villages. Many were old and faded—these were her prizes. The pile of costumes grew to mountain size, but one in particular interested me more than all the rest. It was the costume of Cotzal.

"What rich colors!" I exclaimed. "Imagine a whole village dressed like that. I must go to Cotzal."

"Let me show you where it is," Mrs. Roach said, leading me to a large map. "Have you ever been to Sacapulas?" I confessed that I had not. "Well, here is Sacapulas," she said, putting her finger

on its position, "and if you ever go there and see those mountains, you will get an idea of what it means to go to Cotzal."

If she had told me that there was a funicular over the mountains I should have lost interest; her description of the difficulties made me resolve to miss no opportunity to go to Cotzal.



## XXII

### “Wild Goose” Chase Up the Rio Dulce

I WAS IN PUERTO BARRIOS again after six months. It was the middle of October and the beginning of the dry season, instead of the wet. I had come to meet my wife Elsie and to show her my second country. For by now I felt almost like a Guatemalteco, and the government had given me a *constancia de permanencia*, greatly prolonging my leave to remain in the country.

Mr. Austin, the genial port superintendent, always smiling and cool-looking in that coastal inferno, was now an old friend, and casually, as if it were an ordinary courtesy, he offered me the beautiful yacht *Wild Goose* to take Elsie up the enchanted Rio Dulce.

Rising at five-thirty next morning, I hurried down to the dock. The great blazing sun had set everything glowing brilliantly. Blinding flashes of light, reflected from the many faceted sea, shot through the leaves of the coolly rustling coco palms. It was a morning of pure magic.

There was the white fruiter *Atenas* resting like a somnolent swan beside the disorderly dock. High up in the graceful curving bow stood Elsie, very blonde and white, rouged lips smiling gaily. She was like a beautiful stranger.

Dressed in fresh, cool linens, Mr. Austin came by, beaming brightly.

"I know you're anxious to go 'aboard," he said, "but you'll have to wait for the customs boys."

When they came, I pushed them up the bouncing ladder.

I breakfasted with Elsie on board ship. Chilled grapefruit, pancakes and maple syrup, buttered toast, eggs properly boiled, water that needed no boiling to make it potable, American roast coffee with heavy cream—every item, for me, an almost forgotten luxury.

And then, with a big-shot strut, I handed Elsie onto the *Wild Goose*, and we moved smoothly seaward, stern to the white-lipped shore, on what we knew would be no wild goose chase. Beauty was in the bag.

Our captain was the same wizened Carib who had piloted me around the bay on my first day in Guatemala. Now he had two deck hands, lean, pirate-faced seamen, spawn of the tropic littoral, who I was thankful were endorsed by the Fruit Company. One of them thoughtfully put mattresses and pillows in the bow, and we lay there happily with the salty breeze fanning our cheeks, listening to the slapping of the bright waves against the sharp bow. A shark's fin sliced the water. High overhead a great man-of-war bird planed on powerful pinions, black against the white sky.

For an hour we coasted off the toppling, gladed mountains, covered with blue-green jungle to the water's edge, until we came to the yawning mouth of the Rio Dulce, the frowzy town of Livingston sprawling over the bluff ahead.

In the cluttered harbor lay the queer-looking paddle-wheel river steamers, bizarre banana scows, dugout *cayugas*. We saw the trim white presidential yacht, naked to the keel in drydock, being refurbished.

Under a battery of interrogative looks from shore, we sailed majestically past the seaport squalor up the umbrageous river.

The Rio Dulce cuts its way like a stream of pale green acid through a narrow writhing gorge in the Cordilleras between Lake Izabál and the sea. Palms and mighty trees overhang the gorge; creepers that look like scarlet honeysuckle, flowering vines of every variety of color, orchids, and countless parasites hang in bright garlands and festoons and sprays, intertwining the boughs of the trees and adorning, but not concealing, the masses of bare

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rock and the precipitous crag that frowns amidst all this luxury of vegetation. Silently we entered there and met a deeper silence, the only sound being the purling of the seagoing water against our prow.

A curious thing about the Rio Dulce is that it makes such abrupt turns there are no long vistas, and you appear to be sailing on a little narrow lake instead of along a river. You bear down upon what seems to be a solid wall of greenery, which suddenly swings open like a gate, while another gate swings to behind you, silently, eerily, mysteriously.

All was exactly as when Cortez reached the Rio Dulce on his heroic, foolhardy march from Mexico to Honduras four hundred years ago. Finding a half-starved Spanish colony, he salvaged a stranded brigantine and set out to explore the Rio Dulce. Thus he was the first white man to reach Lake Izabál, Guatemala's first Atlantic harbor.

We were keen to follow his route to the lake, but this would not have given me time to paint, so we turned back. Soon we came to two ranchos half hidden in a thick green mass of trees, where a woman and her daughter in scanty red garments were washing clothes by the bank, children were playing among the chickens and dogs in the flower-splashed yard, and a man was tying up a *cayuga* in the quiet water by the mangrove roots. I asked our captain to drop anchor so that I could paint. To my surprise, instead of doing so, he edged in toward the bank until one of the men could cast a rope around the trunk of a big tree. This brought us close to shore, whereas I wanted to be far enough off to get the river into the foreground of my painting. I said it would not do, we would have to anchor farther out.

"Current very strong," he said.

In midstream the men dropped the huge sea anchor with a great angry splash and gave the anchor rope a half-hitch around the winch. Nothing happened. We drifted with the current as if the great anchor had been a toy. A second attempt had to be made before the anchor held.

There was a terrific noonday glare, the heat rose from the fallow water in steamy, unbreathable waves. It beat through the deck awning, dulling the senses, making us feel giddy and fatigued.





When I finished my sketch, we weighed anchor, and were glad to move again, to feel a stir of air instead of the still weight of the tropic sun. The *Wild Goose* was swept along on the violent current and the great green locks opened and closed before and behind us. The jungle—silent, still, elemental, yet giving the impression of teeming, menacing life—shut us in, leaving only a cut of sultry blue above.

In a surprisingly short time we reached Livingston, and as we tied up at the dock, a horde of curious townspeople gathered to see what dignitaries were honoring their village. They stared blankly as only Elsie and myself, a simple artist and his wife, stepped ashore.

We climbed the long steep street followed by a queue of brown and black urchins. The sun was heavy upon our shoulders, and the stovelike radiation of heat from the paving stones choked back the breath in our throats like a gag. With envy, we

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saw naked negroes, with glistening purple black skins, swimming in the harbor.

At the top of the hill were a few stores, cantinas, and houses, and it was only a short walk to the other side of the bluff, where we found the Carib village, primitive as darkest Africa, human living at its lowest; flimsy thatched ranchos, naked babies, pigs, dogs, slops, dirt, nauseating smells. These Caribs and the Jamaica negroes make up the bulk of the little settlement's population.

Following a grass-grown road, we circled back around the point through the better part of town, and finding a patch of shade, I sat down, feet in the gutter, to paint. A motley crowd of humans and dogs formed to watch me work. The people talked in a strange idiom that was neither Spanish nor the monosyllabic speech of the highland Indians. The boys, restless for action, began to get fresh, unmanageable. We were done in and dying with thirst.

Just then a nice-looking young white couple came up.

"You look wilted," they said. "Wouldn't you like a cool drink?"

Their opportune words fell on our ears as sweetly as Shakespearean verse. Blessing them for their kindness, we went with them to their home. It was a frame house, with a spacious second-story veranda overlooking the sea above a lawn and flowers. An Indian maidservant brought us lemonade and highballs.

Our hosts were Mr. and Mrs. John Klain. They had recently come to Livingston, Mr. Klain having been made the United Fruit Company agent.

At the dock where they came to see us off, we thanked the Klains for their hospitality, and the *Wild Goose* skimmed away through the swiftly falling tropical dusk.

As we skirted the wild shore, we marveled at the spirit of adventure that had fired the souls of such men as Alvarado and Cortez—men who changed the course of life and history of an entire hemisphere. To them we remotely owed this moment of ecstasy as the *Wild Goose* bore us lightly over the waves of Amatique Bay through the tropical night, softly glowing with phosphorescence and starlight.

## XXIII

### Fiesta of the Tzìjolá

**D**UM, DUM—DUM. Dum, dum, dum—dum. The hollow pulsating beat of drums was in our ears all during our stay in Chichicastenango. Primal, monotonous, disturbing, it was the last sound we heard at night, the first that awoke us, and if our sleep were broken, we would be conscious of the dull throbbing rhythm upon the night air. We became jumpy and irritable. That tireless thudding seemed to resound through our bodies as it resounded through the town. Pounding, pounding, pounding deep.

Now and again the church bells rang, not with a sweet intonation, but with a frantic, idiotic jangling, like the beating of dishpans by maniacs.

Then, swish—bang! A rocket would soar and burst, and we would nearly jump out of our skins.

When bells and rockets were quiet, the surging dum, dum—dum; dum, dum, dum—dum of the drums would be heard and felt again.

The Indians were preparing for three important events on their religious calendar—the Changing of the *Cofradia*, the Fiesta of the *Tzìjolá*, and the Day of the Dead. Evil spirits must be driven out. What more effective than noise? Ancient battles were fought with noise as well as weapons, and even the iron-

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nerved conquistadors dreaded the cries, trumpeting conch shells, and hollow thumping drums as much as they did the obsidian-edged weapons of the Indians.

A change had come upon Chichicastenango since I had left it in June. The corn, which had been planted with prayers to the Rain God, had grown in tall, stout stems, and stood in every patio. The town was submerged to the eaves in corn.

Flowers, nurtured by the rains, grew rank in garden and field. Enormous crimson pinwheels of poinsettias burst from the ends of long luxuriant stems, native dahlias grew as tall as trees, huge clusters of magenta bougainvillea swayed from dark limb and white wall, millions of marigolds splashed the hills with their solidified sunshine, and pastel-tinted orchids drooped in delicate sprays from the crevices of forest trees.

There was a noticeable thinning of the market crowds. Thousands of Indians had gone with their families down to the coffee *fincas* to pick the red berries.

A wintry chill was in the air. The carved and painted Spanish-Indian chest in our room was kept filled with firewood. On cloudy days, when we stayed indoors, our barelegged Indian room boy would build a fire in the big stone fireplace, starting it with a few sticks of resin kindling. Our heavy white woolen San Cristóbal blankets, softly patterned with *muñecas* and *animalitos*, were more than welcome at night, even with the hot water bottles.

Our room had white plaster walls and dark beamed ceiling and a red tile floor covered with black Chichicastenango blankets. The first rays of the rising sun, filled with instant warmth, came through an octagonal east window. The many-paned south windows which slid back grumblingly in their frames, overlooked a deep barranca whose opposite slope was patterned with green *maíz* and red tile roofs. The furniture belonged to the colonial period. Windows and doors had come from old houses in Antigua, and the doors, even the one which separated our bath from the adjoining room, were split wide with cracks. The main door had a smaller door set into it. There were latches but no locks. Your ideas of privacy soon become modified in the tropics.

One evening in our room, while I was showing some of my paintings to Miss Mary A. Braun of New York, and José Gomar,

the handsome young Guatemalteco guide, I first thought of having native wood frames made with motifs from Guatemalan life.

"You mean Indians, *animalitos*, and *sopilotes*?—how perfect!" said Miss Braun.

"But can I find anyone to do it?" I asked José.

"An Indian wood-carver can do anything," he said.

The next time I was in Guatemala City, I looked up a native carver. Taking a taxi, I was jolted over dirt streets full of deep holes and set down half-dazed before a mean house. A young woman with a baby at her breast answered my knock, and as I entered the dark interior, some white chickens flew up into my face with frightened squawks. The young woman laughed. Then I nearly stepped upon a baby lying on a *petate*; more treble laughter. Afraid of what I might blunder upon next, I waited a moment until my sight became adjusted to the blackness before passing on into the patio, where I saw under a straw awning in a corner a much-littered work bench, before which sat a little brown man. This was Samuel, the wood-carver.

I outlined to him what I wanted and saw by the light in his quick, intelligent eyes that he understood. Then I put twenty dollars into his competent-looking hands as a payment on account and said that I would be back in town in two months.

And two months later he brought me the finished frames, no two alike, and all flawlessly carved of silky *matilisguate*, or white mahogany, with typical Indian designs and little figures of men and women, flowers, tigers, *ollas*, and *sopilotes*. They were a joy to behold, the work of an artist as well as of a skilled craftsman.

The big Sunday market in Chichicastenango, with its hushed noise and loud smells, was in full swing.

Mass had been said, and from the dark arch at the top of the church steps debouched a procession of brilliantly clad Indians. First came the *chirimia* player with a drum strapped to his shoulders. Next, the drummer. Then a man with a swinging censer, men and women of the *cofradia*, rocket bearers, an amazing succession of crimson-canopied litters with life-size figures of the saints borne on the shoulders of men, a jigging Indian with an equestrian figure under his arm—the *Tzizolá*—Padre Rossbach

holding the host under a silken sunshade supported by six Indians, and a long queue of worshippers.

This painted stream flowed slowly through the streets of the town, to the throbbing murmur of the drum and the reedy piping of the six-note *chirimia*. At every intersection it paused and the pause was signaled by the firing of a rocket or a cannon cracker.

Carrying shining silver maces, the men of the *cofradia* wore their red and purple *tzutes* passed like scarves across their shoulders and their usual costume was covered by a black wool tunic. The women wore a long surplice-like white *guipil* with a beautiful symbolic yoke woven of bright red wool, and carried tall lighted tapers.

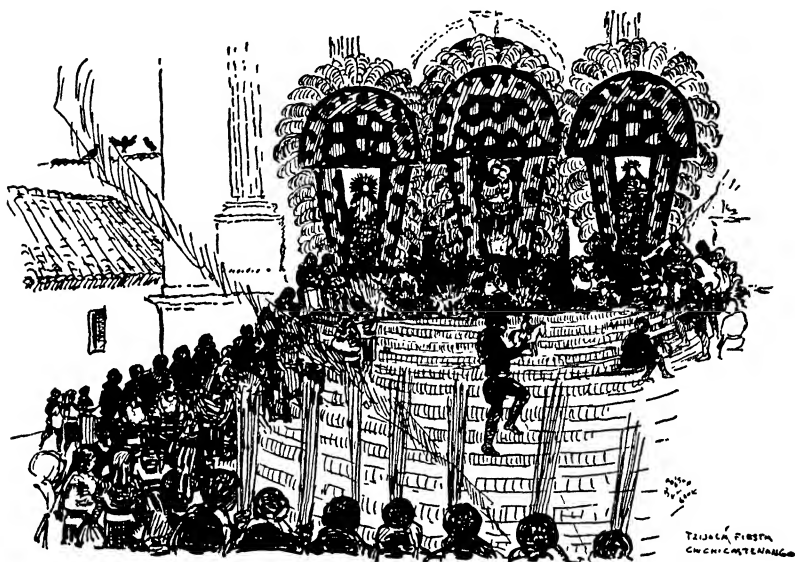
Strange to see were the purely Indian touches making the gaudy canopies of the saints still gaudier—flashing mirrors and tinsel and a fringe of brightly dyed plumes. Objection to these barbaric additions had cost Padre Rossbach's predecessor his parish. Chief of the deities carried on the litters was a white-bearded figure, strongly resembling a department store Santa Claus, worshiped by the Indians as the *Eterno Padre*.

But the oddest sight was the jiggling Keeper of the *Tzijolá* with his little white horse held in his hands. Mounted on the horse, was a figure dressed in dark green, more Spanish than Indian, about whose neck was looped a chain of old coins. A leather *alforja* or saddlebag, was slung from his shoulder, and there were two tiny bells on the neck of the horse which tinkled as the Keeper of the *Tzijolá* jiggged up and down, up and down to the throbbing rhythm of the drum and the thin piping of the *chirimia*.

In this pagan procession the venerable padre, dressed in a rich robe of silver-and-gold brocade, with his silver-fringed bald head bared and the glittering gilt host held steadily before him, moved like a captive between his escort of six Indian canopy bearers. Revered, yes, but as if he were one with the velvet-robed wooden saints. It was an Indian festival, and his part in it was a small one, belonging merely to the preliminaries. Earlier, he had conducted mass, and now he was being led back into the church; his role was played. But the fiesta of the *Tzijolá*, so

strangely interwoven with the Catholic celebration of All Saints' Day, had only just begun.

After the *Eterno Padre* with his retinue of saints, and the parish padre had been swallowed up by the dark arched entrance



of the church, three of the litters with immensely tall scarlet canopies decorated with mirrors and bright plumes were stationed upon the top of the altar-like steps and the drum and *chirimia* players took their places on the stone benches between the great columns of the façade. And now began the Dance of the Keeper of the *Tzizolá*, which lasted two hours.

With the little horse and rider held in one hand and a hissing pinwheel in the other, he jiggled back and forth, back and forth upon the lower steps, in time with the mesmerizing beat of the drum and peeping of the *chirimia*. On the steps above, the solemn Brotherhood in their black wool tunics and silver maces held at arm's length before them, knelt in prayer. At intervals a rocket would swish skyward and burst with an ear-splitting report over the plaza, or a cannon cracker would explode upon the steps; and now and then a layman would interrupt the

dancer to place an offering of coins in the shoulder bag of the *Tz'jolá*.

At eleven o'clock the trancelike dance ended. A tightrope was strung from a stake in front of the church to the central belfry, and upon this tight rope the *Tz'jolá* was pulled up and down, up and down, hour after hour. The rocket bearers stood in a semicircle in front of the semicircular pyramidal steps. Drum and *chirimía*, cannon crackers and rockets never ceased. On the smoke-begrimed pagan altar at the foot of the steps a slow fire of copal incense sent black smoke wreathing skyward, filling the air with pungent perfume.

And all the while the great Sunday market went on as usual in the open square around the big stone *pila* and under the jacaranda and eucalyptus trees, adding its odors and low murmur to the sharper smells and sounds of the fiesta. But few of the venders paid any heed to the repetitive performance upon the church steps or to the bursting of rockets overhead.

All morning I sketched this weird pageantry, and then I went about trying to find out the meaning of the *Tz'jolá*.

I asked *Señor Lara*, the artist-druggist of Chichicastenango.

"*Quién sabe?*—Who knows?" he said. "It is *costumbre*—what their forefathers did. That explains everything the Indians do."

I next asked Don Jaime Pensabene, the labor agent.

"*Quién sabe?*" said he, talking between teeth gripped around a cigar butt, "Some say the little rider is the Fire God, but he looks like St. James. He must have originated since the conquest, because there were no horses before. Santiago, *Tz'jolá*—see how similar? The Indians turned the saints of the Spaniards into gods of their own."

Finally I asked Padre Rossbach.

"*Quién sabe?*" shrugged the good priest, taking a pinch of snuff. "The Indians are very secretive. Although I have worked among them for thirty years, there are many things they will not tell me. I have questioned my sacristans, and one of them tells me that the *Tz'jolá* is a messenger sent with offerings to propitiate the Sun God, so that the sun may shine again after the long rainy season. But there are many versions. Perhaps the Indians believe all of them."

In the evening, Owen Smith, Elsie, and I started to climb



Pocojil, on whose summit, it is said, the Indians have laid out with stones the plan of the square of Chichicastenango with the two churches facing each other. There are altars upon the imaginary steps where the Indians burn their *pom* and enact their ritual exactly as they do in the village. We wanted to see this extraordinary sight, but had to give up on account of darkness.

As we descended, we saw amazingly beautiful views of Chichicastenango, spread out over the finger-like ridges of barrancas. Beautiful too, were the far flung mountains with their uptossed volcanic peaks in the flat grayness of the brief tropical twilight. The hollow thud of drums—dum, dum—dum: dum, dum, dum—dum, dum—reached our ears.

"Look! They are carrying the saints through the streets again," Elsie cried.

Above the red tile roofs and white walls, we could see the plumed canopies bobbing, as they passed to the end of the street and entered a large compound where, screened from blue eyes, the last secret rites of the Fiesta of the *Tzizolá* would be celebrated during the night. Looking down upon the milling, barbarically trimmed canopies, and listening to the exploding rockets and the primal drum beat, we felt the age-old spirit of Guatemala, colorful, mysterious, encompassing, and, in that far-off place with its thousands of Indians and handful of white people, not a little fearsome.

Next morning—All Souls' Day—the Guatemalan painter, Garavito, came to take us to witness the mass said for the dead in the little chapel in the cemetery. We arrived, however, just as the service ended.

All the graves and tombstones were lavishly decorated with wreaths of flowers and crepe paper. Pinwheels, rosettes, festoons and streamers of bright-colored crepe paper were stretched from head-stone to foot of many of the graves, while over others were scattered pine needles and marigolds, which the Indians call the Flowers of the Dead. Through the open doors of the vaults we saw wreaths and bouquets of flowers and burning candles.

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Before the chapel a woman had set up a small table and was selling cakes.

Indians and ladinos wandered through the cemetery, or sat by the graves of their departed, talking quietly. In the evening, we were told, they would return to drink *aguardiente* in this festive burial place.

At noon, as we climbed the steep hill back to the Mayan Inn, we were startled by the terrific explosion of rockets, in volley after volley, above the Calvario, which the Indians have dedicated to the souls of their ancestors.



QUETZALTENANGO

## XXIV

### Sacapulas, Eden of the Cuchumatanes

ONE DAY WE drove with Padre Rossbach to Sacapulas. We had heard that Sacapulas was a tropical Eden in the heart of the cold Cordilleras, where the women wore exquisite head-dresses and lace *guipiles* and were the most provocatively pretty among all the inland tribes.

Driving in a northerly direction, we passed through Santa Cruz Quiché and several unmapped picturesque villages. The country grew wilder and more desolate as we progressed, but the barefoot Indian driver handled the car with inborn native skill.

After we had crossed two sierras, ascending to an altitude of nine or ten thousand feet in doing so, we began to wind sharply down. Our ears throbbed and popped, and the padre stuffed his with cotton.

"Do you do the same thing going up?" Elsie asked.

"I usually cut off my ears going up," he said whimsically.

The country became awe-inspiring in its vastness and desolation. Far below in the immense valley the silvery Rio Negro beckoned, and beyond, the Cuchumatanes rose in a sheer rocky wall, marked from bottom to top with a faint zigzagging line.

"That," said the padre, "is the trail to Cotzal."

"Whew!" I whew-ed.

He smiled.

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"Ach! That is only the beginning—the easiest part. Beyond is another mountain range and a much worse trail."

Cotzal was one Indian village I longed to see. My desire to go there had crystallized into an ambition from the time I first saw the gorgeous Cotzal costume in the collection of Tocsika Roach. But right then I felt ready to forget it.

As we neared Sacapulas, heat rose in waves from the valley as from a brazier. We had already removed the overcoats which had been necessary in Chichicastenango, and now we stripped to shirt sleeves.

Sacapulas is only twenty-five hundred feet high, practically sea level as Guatemaltecos reckon. It is the tropics of palms, mangoes, papayas, bananas, sugar cane, and watermelons; of gaudy flowers, butterflies, and birds; of drowsy days and polar nights; of life concentrated in the shade of gigantic trees and in the warm waters of volcanic springs.

Parking under the immense *ceiba* in the plaza, we went to look at the ancient salt works.

Our way led past the beautiful, creamy white Spanish church, before which stood two tall coco palms like sentinels in shakos. A crooked street that ran between white walls brought us to a scene that has not changed in hundreds of years. It was old when Thomas Gage, the first non-Spaniard in Guatemala, saw it over three centuries ago.

Here we watched the Indians carrying hodfuls of mud up from the salt beds by the river. This mud they dumped into great hoppers and soaked with water, which dripped down into tile basins in a thick brownish liquid which looked like black bean soup. We tasted it and it had a strong salty flavor.

Beside the hoppers were low, grimy huts built into the hillside like caves. On the earthen floors were thick cement pegs about a foot high, spaced in rows six or eight inches apart. Upon these rested shallow clay bowls filled with the mud-strained brackish water, kept simmering by the hot coals strewn beneath. Through evaporation, a grayish white cake is obtained. This is the native salt, which we later saw being sold, mold and all, in the local market.

During all the centuries that the Indians have been working the salt beds, the good earth has never failed to produce.

Rising high up in the Cuchumatanes, the river, already broad and deep as it flows past Sacapulas, is still in its infancy. As it winds through hundreds of miles of changing tropical scenery, its volume swells and swells, augmented by mighty tributaries, until fat with the watery tribute of the Cuchumatanes, the Petén, Chiapas, Campeche, and Tabasco, it rolls wearily into the Gulf of Mexico. It changes its name from time to time. Here it is called the Rio Negro; below it is known as the Chixoy, but when it reaches its fullness, the Rio Negro-Chixoy becomes the Usumacinta. It is the Old Man River of Central America.

After an alfresco lunch, while the good padre stretched out on a *petate* with his handkerchief spread over his face to take his "Mexican exercise," Elsie and I wandered off in search of scenes.

Strolling up the river, we came to the ruin of the old Spanish bridge. Its approaches, still intact, were surprisingly wide, and its bulkheads, shaped like prows to part the onrushing waters, surprisingly well preserved. But four centuries of floods, bearing upon their riled waters the trunks of mighty trees, had at last battered down the great arches. We stared in admiration. They were great builders, those early Spaniards.

Under a leafy ledge sheltering a small beach we saw a spring in which many women and children were bathing, while others, bare to the hips, were beating out wash on the soap-whitened boulders along the river's edge. Scattered about where the hot sun struck were freshly laundered multi-colored garments.

I began at once to sketch, disregarding the baleful glances of some of the bathers.

Indian women at the bath, as I have remarked before, make marvelous models because they devote hours to their ablutions, and I became absorbed in studying the rounded beauty of their bodies and the unblemished golden smoothness of their skin. In all the world there are no people more beautifully formed; even the aged never lose their curving grace, and a depilatory drummer would soon go broke in Guatemala.

While I sketched, other women and children, some with head-baskets overflowing with vivid laundry, came to the spring. Turning their backs to us, they drew their lace *guipiles* off over their heads, untwined the figured *cintas* from their long, lus-

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trous black hair and then, squatting in the shallow water, unwrapped their striped skirts from around their sleek hips. After their bath, the bathers shrouded themselves from head to foot in white sheets and crouched in the shade of the ferny overhanging bank while the warm wind dried them.

We saw one woman take from her basket what looked like a big brown carrot. After washing it in the river and scraping it on a large flat stone until the outer skin was worn off, leaving the underneath a pale parsnip yellow, she pounded it to a pulp with a hammerhead rock. Placing this pulp in her *gaucal* and stirring in a little water, she soon had a beautiful suds with which to wash her clothes. In this handy way had her ancestors—can one say fore-mothers?—made soap from the native soaproot long before the coming of the conquistadors.

Engrossed with observing and sketching this scene, I was startled into the realization that a poisonous elderly woman was addressing a loud torrent of language at us.

"I can't understand a word," Elsie said. "But I'd say she was giving us h-e-double-l."

"Just ignore her."

But the voluble virago would not be ignored. She stirred up the others, who began to look at us with black-browed scowls. I remembered my experience with the women on the coast and decided to decamp.

Back in the town we met Padre Rossbach chatting with the *comandante*, a bantam-like ladino with a revolver on his hip.

"Well, did you get what you wanted?" asked the padre.

When we related our experience, the *comandante* spoke up.

"But it is preposterous that the Indian women should object to your painting in a public place," he said. "Come, I will go back with you."

And so, for the second time in Guatemala, I painted with an armed bodyguard.

Before leaving Sacapulas we sat for a while in the shade of the big *ceiba* in the plaza. A light breeze rustled the thick, drooping foliage, and from the *escuela de niños* came the piping of children's voices in oral recitation. A few women with a few cents' worth of fruits and sugar-cane candy displayed on banana leaves, made market under the far-spreading branches.



I began to sketch, ignoring  
the baleful looks of the bathers

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Elsie's sweet tooth troubled her as she looked at the sugar-cane candy. There were two kinds, one that was in straight pieces like bits of twisted rope, and another in flat cakes encrusted with roasted ground corn and peanuts.

"Do I dare?" she asked Padre Rossbach.

"Of course; it's delicious. Try some," he assured her.

It was so good that we decided to buy out the entire supply.

"*Cuanto vale?*" I asked as I received the package neatly done up in a banana leaf and bound with a vine stem.

"*Cuatro centavos,*" said the *vendedora*. Four cents!

As we climbed over the mountains toward Chichicastenango, my eyes were drawn longingly to the perpendicular trail to Cotzal.





## XXV

### Art Jury Duty

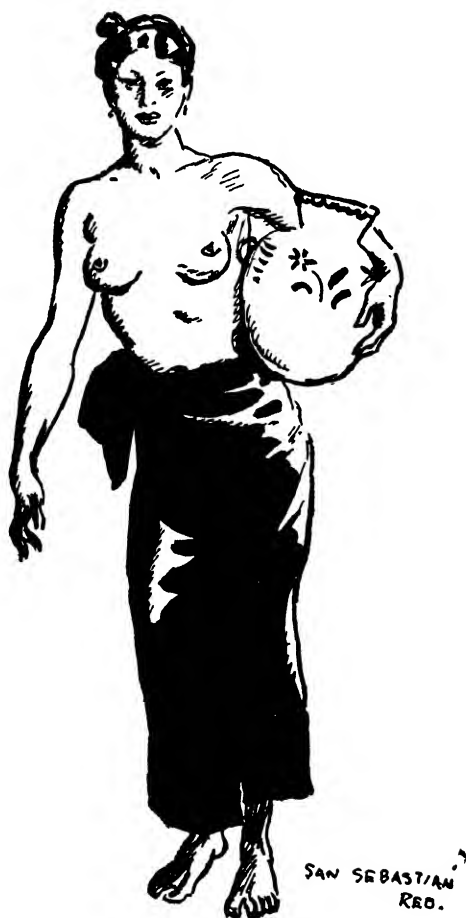
**A**LTHOUGH WE had entertained the alluring prospect of a week on Lake Atitlán, we returned directly to Guatemala City because Mayor Bickford had asked me to serve on the art jury for the November Fair with Rafael Perez de Leon and Alejandro Deutschmann.

Seventy-five paintings were submitted in the competition for the two cash prizes—really an amazing total for so small a community—and I was already familiar enough with Guatemalan art to miss the work of some of the best artists: Carmen Pettersson, Fritz Schaeffer, Arathoon, and Arimany, who for some reason were not represented. A good, or rather a bad, third of the entries depicted the President, and were painted with patriotic fervor and very little else. Several had real ribbons and decorations pasted on them. Two paintings of Chichicastenango—an oil by Garavito and a paper by Rodas Corso, easily won the cash awards.

The following day, November 10th, was the President's birthday. The occasion called for the cessation of business and increased activity in the bars and cantinas; for dining, wining, and dancing of gaily dressed and uniformed people in the clubs and main hotels; for marimba bands vying with each other in the street; for navy blue uniforms instead of khaki on the traffic

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cops who so smartly direct the jumbled movement of autos, surreys, motorcycles, soldiers, packmules, oxcarts, and *cargadores* from under their stationary umbrellas; for promenading by day and pyrotechnics by night. We heard that the President flees to his *finca* or to his chalet on Lake Amatitlán to escape the noisy celebration of his natal day.



## XXVI

### When Coffee Is Red

**A**LTHOUGH WE had heard a great deal about coffee, it was not until we visited Finca Mocá during the harvest that we really appreciated the time, care, labor, and infinity of steps necessary to convert the red berries into a cup of black coffee. After picking, there are nine distinct processes to which the berries are subjected before they are ready to be sacked and shipped, and there are still three more—roasting, grinding, and boiling—before they become a drinkable beverage.

After watching the pickers at their fussy task—if the berries are not twisted off gently, the shrub may refuse to flower next April—and following the slow steps by which the lustrous blue coffee bean finally emerges from its many coats, it seemed incredible that the secret of coffee ever came to light. The Germans have a joke that the discoverer of coffee was an Arab camel driver who, after inhaling the fragrant aroma from his campfire of dried camel dung, noted that his beast had been feeding upon coffee berries; but if there is a more official legend, I do not know it.

Under the light shade of the *chalums*, the lustrous coffee shrubs with their clusters of red berries look like some species of holly. A thousand Indians have come down from the highlands for the harvest, which began in September and would

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continue through December. Their talk, laughter, and hallooing, and the small trumpeting of the *caporales'* *bocinas* directing the work echo through the barrancas from dawn until the four o'clock *finca* bell calls the *mozos* with their sacks of berries to the *beneficio*.

Juan Garcia has come down from Chichicastenango for the harvest because the law requires him to perform one hundred and fifty "tasks" each year for the good of agriculture. His wife and children have come with him and help him with the picking. Many wives, who object to working in the fields, time their pregnancies to excuse them, or so they are accused of doing by the *finqueros*.

The nimble brown hands of Juan and his wife fly over the long drooping stems, twisting off the ripe berries and dropping them into the big shallow baskets suspended by a rope from their waists. As their baskets fill up, they empty them into a sack, and by four o'clock this sack, which holds six *arrobas*, or one hundred and fifty pounds of berries, is full. It is almost as tall as Juan Garcia and nearly twice his own weight, but he slings it upon his powerful back with the aid of a tumpline passed across his forehead and trots home with it over the up-and-down paths through the *cafetales*. In the crook of his right arm, left free by the tumpline, he carries his machete.

Hundreds of brown-skinned *mozos*, dressed much like himself in high-crowned straw hats, white shirts, red sashes, white trousers rolled to the calf, and crude *caites* or sandals, darken the receiving floor. They do not wear their dashing highland costumes on the *finca*. Only the men from Sololá retain their colored shirts and checked woolen aprons. Juan sets down his sack with an air of pride and casts a lofty glance at sacks less well filled. Beads of sweat stand on his low brow at the roots of his straight black hair. He hands the checker his card, which reads: "No. 300. Juan Garcia." And the date. Below are three columns in which are checked the amount of berries delivered. The number is Juan's number on the pay roll.

Juan empties his sack into the receiving hopper, and the *caporal* levels off the berries with his hands and calls out the number of *arrobas* to the two checkers.

"Number three hundred. Six *arrobas*," calls the first checker.



FINCA AIOCA'

Her nimble brown hands fly  
over the long drooping stems

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The second checker looks up Juan's number in his ledger and credits him with having picked six *arrobas*. Then he punches Juan's card.

Since four *arrobas* constitute a *caja*, or box, which is the basis of one task, Juan has completed one task and a half. The law fixes a minimum of twelve cents for a box, but Mocá pays top prices.

The *caporal* dumps the coffee into a big receiving tank, and at once segregation begins. Sound berries sink, while those that have dried on the tree or are imperfect, float.

An automatic syphon system now carries the berries from the bottom of the tanks to the dispulpers which remove the red-skinned outer pulp. Every berry except the freak pea berry is composed of two beans, and these are covered by a sweetish slime which is got rid of by leaving the beans in fermenting vats for from twenty-four to seventy-two hours until it rots. Then the coffee is sluiced through the washing canals. During this operation men keep stirring the coffee so that the light beans and foreign substances will come to the surface and float off. The washed coffee is diverted into cement-floored patios and spread out to dry. It is now in hard, clean coverings of parchment, and is called *café en oro* because of its light golden color.

*Fincas* the size of Mocá, which are expected to produce an average crop of seventy-five hundred quintals of coffee, can afford to have an artificial dryer—*secador*—to speed the drying process. In the drying, the flavor of coffee is set, so it is important that it be done slowly and evenly. The hot-air dryers are equipped with paddles to churn the coffee, and hold from ninety to one hundred quintals. A quintal is approximately one hundred pounds, English. To *finqueros* forced to depend solely upon the erratic fall sunshine, drying is a sore problem. Not only must the coffee be constantly turned with wooden rakes, bedded away at night, and spread out again in the morning, but it must be hurriedly scraped under shelter with every passing shower.

From the dryers the coffee goes to the hullers, which remove the parchment covering as well as the tissue-thin membrane which covers the bean inside of the parchment. The beans are now polished under special pressure until they are a light lustrous

blue to impress the coffee buyers; for there is as much fol-de-rol about coffee as about wine and whisky.

As the beans leave the polishers, fans force the light beans up into a separate chute, while the heavy ones fall into the elevator shaft that carries them to the machines which, with the uncanny precision of mindless things, separate and grade them. Finally, the lowest-grade beans, including "elephants" and pea berries, are hand-picked by Indian women.

For every five hundred pounds of ripe berries dumped into the receiving vats there issues from the separators eighty pounds of cleaned coffee. Mocá ships its coffee in heavy canvas bags woven in the *finca* colors and stamped with the name of the *finca*. Each bag holds one hundred and fifty-two pounds net.



Warning us to expect the primitive, Owen Smith invited us to spend the day with him at Finca Panamá. This *finca*, lying some fifteen miles to the east of Mocá, had once been one of the finest coffee properties in Guatemala, but in late years had been allowed to go to wrack and ruin. Owen's father had recently purchased it and turned it over to him to rehabilitate. With what labor he could muster, Owen was reclaiming the *cafetales* from the morning glories and picking the pickable coffee.

As we had been asked to come to breakfast, we were up at

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dawn, bowling over the bumpy road in a truck driven by a barefoot Indian. We arrived esthetically gorged with the beauty of the opalescent volcanoes, but physically famished from our vibratory dash through the chill morning air.

We ate breakfast in the company of the German *administrador*, the ladino bookkeeper, and a chattering monkey. The house boy was an *asustado*—one of those perpetually scared-looking Indians whose hair was born on end.

After breakfast we went out to paint, having learned from experience not to place too much confidence in the constancy of the sun.

Choosing a view of Volcano Atitlán including in the foreground a corner of the balcony of the no-longer-grand *casa grande*, we sat on some stones in the shadow of a bamboo-walled rancho. A while later we were amazed to hear through the porous partitions a treble voice singing in Spanish to the tune of "After the Ball is Over." The simple explanation of this surprising link with home was that the singer was a ladina who had once visited the States.

Upon completing my sketch, we roamed through the unkempt rancheria, primitive as a village of darkest Africa, or darkest Guatemala. Smoke from the three-stone fireplaces on the bare earth floors seeped through the spaces between the bamboo walls and blackened the weathered thatch roofs. The odor of *maíz* being boiled in lime joined forces with the smells of unrestrained animal life. On every door was painted a white cross to keep the devil out.

Most *fincas* have their private chapel, but on Panamá we saw only a big wall-less pagan meetinghouse with a high-pitched roof of thatch set on rough-hewn wooden pillars.

After the manicured neatness of Mocá, Panamá looked as if it belonged to the era of the pioneers, and it was a mine of pictorial beauty.

Having once sampled Owen's dare-devil driving, we knew what to expect that afternoon when we started out with him in his car for a high-perched *cafetal*. But we wanted to see a certain thatched depot in the *cafetal* even at the risk of having a few vertebrae dislodged.



There was not even the semblance of a road in the direction we took.

"Don't worry. Wherever a mule can go, I can drive," Owen said.

And, until he was finally stymied by a fallen tree, he succeeded in demonstrating his theory, although neither of us ever expected to be the same again. When Owen became a *finquero*, the automobile industry lost a test driver with genius.

The scene we had come to witness was worth the chiropractic treatment we had had getting there. The remaining climb on foot to the depot, which stood on a shelf two thousand feet above the *casa grande*, steadied my nerves, and I painted with furious haste as the Indians brought in their coffee and the creaking ox carts came to carry it away. In a moment the clearing was filled with hundreds of working and watching Indians.

At last Owen said, "We'll have to make a dash for the car before the carts get there or we'll never get down." And off the three of us ran.

As we banged and crashed downward in the car, all the Indians, delighted by our queer grimaces and antics in the effort to keep from having our brains dashed out against the top, ran after us, yelling and laughing and waving their shining machetes.

"Ay, *patrón!*" they shouted. And Owen good-humoredly shouted back, "Ay, *José!* Ay, *Manuel!*" like a rebel general leading a band of revolutionists.

Back at the *casa grande*, with the car and ourselves apparently still structurally intact, we had tea—which in Guatemala means coffee—with delicious scones and strained honey.

And then I went out to sketch the quiet milling throng of oxen and Indians about the receiving hopper. Owen took my drawing and showed it to the *mozos*, saying in his laughing boyish manner, "See, Chilo, there you are and your bag is only half-full; shame on you." The Indians like his way with them. At night they come to him with their troubles, love affairs, and quarrels to be settled.

The Indian carpenter handed me a huge fan-shaped fungus upon which he had scratched a house with trees, flowers, birds, and bugs. In graceful Spanish, he told me that he admired my

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sketches and wished to give me, as one artist to another, this figment of his own fancy. I thanked him for his astonishing gift, but I have found it more convenient to keep the memory of it than the actual fungus, although the drawing of one very large bug fascinated me.

Owen, with test-driver technique, drove us madly back to Mocá, whose lights were now blinking like terrestrial stars through a soupy fog that filled the mountain amphitheater. After we had thanked him for our lively day at Panamá, he backed his car with a flourish—and went into a ditch.

"Get me ten *mozos*," Owen cheerfully ordered Carlos, who came on the run.

Soon the ten *mozos* came softly padding through the fog down from the rancheria, and the car was put back on the road.

Again we said good-bys. But the car, as if driven beyond automotive endurance, failed to respond to the kick on the starter. There was a vicious spitting and snapping under the hood and the motor burst into flames.

"Tie that—a short!" said Owen with mild surprise and sent Carlos scooting for a pail of water.

One afternoon we were sitting with the Seton Guthries on the second-story veranda of their delightful old house at Finca Santa Adelaida. At our back was grim Volcano Atitlán, and below the windows was the garden from which came the scent of tropical flowers. The tawny road, rutted by rains, ran down the hill between the irregular rude ranchos, among which wandered bright Indians, naked babies, roosters, and hens. A muffled roar of rushing waters came through the wild greenery that screened a barranca.

Santa Adelaida was one of the first *fincas* on the coffee coast. The old house was three stories high and built of wood—a dangerous height and a dangerous material for the tropics, where earthquakes and termites make a destructive combination.

Mr. Guthrie brought up the subject of earthquakes, saying that before a temblor makes itself felt one hears a dull rumbling, rapidly growing louder and louder, as if immense boulders were rolling down from the mountain top.

"You'll hear an earthquake," he assured us. "We always get 'em during the change of the seasons."

He had scarcely spoken when we heard a low thundering roll that grew momentarily more distinct. It sounded exactly like an avalanche, and when we felt that it was about to strike, the house began to tremble and sway, gently at first and then more and more violently until the pictures swung drunkenly on the walls, objects fell off tables and dressers with thuds and broken tinklings, and the heaving floor made our chairs seem to be trying to unseat us. Out in the rancheria we saw the Indians flying from their dancing ranchos and frantically collecting their children in the open where they would be safe from falling tiles. Nearly two ghastly minutes passed in this shaking suspense, and then, with surprising suddenness, it was over.

Not to be caught by a second convulsion, we hurried downstairs, where we found the house servants on bended knees, praying fervidly over lighted candles.

So seldom do the Indians hold their market by the light of the stars and their kerosene torches, that in all of my travels in Guatemala I saw only one night plaza and that was on Finca Mocá. A certain group of traveling merchants who make a weekly circuit of the *fincas* in the region, choose Saturday night to come to Mocá, because it is the biggest *finca* and they know that after dark the *mozos* and their families will be in from the fields and the *beneficio*.

One night I went out to paint the strange night colors and the dramatic lighting, and while I was working I observed several pretty and proud-looking Indian women whose costume outrivaled in beauty all the others. I had seen the costume before in the collection of Tocsika Roach and had never forgotten it, but now for the first time I saw it being worn, and I knew at once that these women were from Cotzal. Could I get one of these highland Helens to pose for me? That was the question I put to Tom Jessup that night, but he was not optimistic. Their husbands were very jealous, he said, and the Indians of Cotzal had a clannish toploftiness that made them difficult to get along with.

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But next morning the *mayordomo* brought word that he had persuaded a Cotzal woman to pose for me, provided I would paint her in his patio in the presence of all her relatives. Hurrying to the *mayordomo*'s house, I hopefully expected to find one of the slim, proud beauties I had seen in the plaza, but I found no one at all. My model, it seemed, had gone first to bathe in the stream.

After an hour's impatient heel-cooling, during which I mentally pictured my model as a gorgeously arrayed Indian Venus, she arrived with her entourage of family chaperones. I stared incredulously; the *mayordomo* smiled broadly, while the chaperones eyed me with truculence and suspicion. For a moment I suspected a joke. The woman they had brought me, far from being the sylph I expected, was homely and fat, and about to become a mother. The idea that this baby-faced, bovine-bellied hill-woman could cause even the most jealous husband a second's uneasiness was ludicrous to the point of fantasy.

But while she was no beauty, she was a type. She had the small piquant features of her race, and her costume, although somewhat overstuffed, was exceedingly ornamental, even if the wearer wasn't.

Her relatives formed a belligerent half-circle about me, watching sharply to see that I pulled nothing shady, cast no spells, and lived up to my agreement to pay something for nothing. Posing was doing nothing, therefore it was not work; and it seemed utterly screwy to them that a white man should pay an Indian for not doing anything. But they were quick to take advantage of the phenomenon. At the end of an hour, a cat-eyed, hatchet-faced woman relative, who had been standing directly behind me noisily chewing and snapping a wad of *zapote* gum, incited my model to a stand-up strike for more pay. After much argument, I was forced to pay double time for overtime, which shows how quickly economic ideas can hatch right out of the virgin air.

## XXVII

Sofia, Francisca,  
Josefa, and Otilia

FROM DON CONRADO'S cheery welcome at San Sebastián station, we would never have guessed that one of his truck drivers had just been jailed for homicide, or that he himself had been up all the night before delivering an Indian baby.

When we arrived at Buena Vista, we found Doña Leonore and her daughter Julia filling small bottles with odoriferous perfume and pomade, stringing beads, and making candy bags from the pages of old magazines as Christmas gifts for the *mozos* and their families. There are a thousand *colonos* and none is forgotten.

We heard that the bridal costume of San Sebastián was exceedingly lovely, and one morning Don Conrado drove us into the town to help us find a more or less recent bride to pose for me.

At every door Don Conrado cried "Ay *Maria!*" Until you know an Indian's proper name you call all women Maria, and all men José. But the women were either too proud or too frightened to answer. Fortunately for us, it was shortly before the annual saint's day fiesta, and many men had stayed in from the fields to whitewash the walls of their ranchos, which they are required by law to do at this time. Most of these fellows told

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us waggishly that there had not been a wedding in San Sebastián in years, but one of them directed us to the house of a man who was soon to be married. An aged Indian came to the door.

"Yes, I am going to be married next week," he grinned. "But my wife won't wear a bridal costume this time."

Pursuing our quest we learned of a well-to-do couple that had been married within the year, and going to their house, which was rather larger than most and prosperously plastered, we found a young man and a very pretty girl, who was suckling a tiny infant.

The man told us that his wife had a bridal costume, but that she had recently sent it to Quezaltenango to be copied for a friend who was about to be wed. He said he knew of no other costume in the village.

Don Conrado turned to me. "That," he said, "seems to be that."

We asked the man if his wife would pose for me with her baby, but at the suggestion his face clouded with jealousy and suspicion and he spoke in *idioma* to his wife, who retired to the black depths of the rancho. As we were on the point of leaving, however, he said that his wife had three sisters, *todos muy chulas*, and that perhaps one of them would be willing to sit for me. So we followed him through a yard shaded by pink-flowering *achiote* trees and coco palms to a thatched bamboo rancho where the three girls, slender, shy, and one nearly as *chula* as the other, lived.

Sofia, the youngest and prettiest, agreed to pose. She was perhaps no more than fourteen years of age, no longer a girl, yet not quite a woman; in her body youth and maturity were impalpably blended in a beauty that was full of rich promise. Her figure was finely proportioned: arms well rounded, hands and feet small and beautifully shaped, shoulders firm and lustrous, breast dainty and gently swelling. Her hair, which had a blue-black sheen, was wound around her head and tied in a careless knot over her low, full brow.

She sat in the doorway of her rancho, her hands resting in her lap and nervously toying with a bit of sewing. Her only garment was a striped blue cotton *corte* wound tightly around her slender girlish thighs. I could see her heart palpitating wildly

at first, but gradually her fears subsided and her breast grew calm.

A huge spotted pig came and wallowed in the dust beside me and chickens messed over my shoes. I imagined I could feel the *niguas* burrowing in around my toe nails. The yard soon filled with curious onlookers, a few men and many women and children. Some of the little girls, hardly more than babies themselves, had been given naked babies to mind and held them on their hips as their mothers do.

As the painting progressed, the Indians pressed closer, commenting in subdued, wondering tones, laughing softly and pointing timidly. They had never before seen an artist at work and were a little nonplussed as the likeness and colors took form on the white paper. But so far as the young girls were concerned, Elsie with her blonde hair, strange clothes, and stranger speech completely stole the show. She was knitting a blue wool muffler for me which she had begun as a Penelope task before she joined me in Guatemala and which made a natural bridge between herself and a people born to such occupations.

"What do you call this?" she asked.

"*Bufanda*," they giggled.

"And what are your names?"

After they had all told her their names they wanted to know ours, which they thought very funny, and so did we as they pronounced them: Eelsah and Adweeson.

Elsie had discovered that by putting an a or an o on the end of most English words you can Hispanicize them, and often make yourself better understood than if you spoke hesitantly though more correctly. At least you can always be sure of holding your audience through sheer fascination, and though the natives are so polite that they will rarely laugh in your face at your droll errors, they are not above being taken by surprise.

Even I started when I heard Elsie say, "*Mucho coola aqui*," and the Indians would not have been human had they been able to control their blushes and laughter. Of course she had merely intended to observe that it was much cooler here under the palms and *acbiotes*, but unfortunately *cula* in good Spanish slang means backside!

By the time my portrait of Sofia was finished, the Indians of

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San Sebastián had taken us into their hearts, and a comely young woman named Francisca offered to pose for me at her loom the next morning.

All the children were eagerly on the lookout for our return and ran down the street to greet us, gaily shouting: "Eelsah! Adweeson!", and with this noisy juvenile escort we proceeded to Francisca's rancho behind its high hedge of hibiscus.

For the occasion Francisca had put on her best silk *corte* striped in vivid bands of scarlet, green, yellow, blue, and purple. She sat on a low stool with her legs stretched straight before her, one end of her primitive two-stick loom held taut about her waist by a leather tumpline, while the other was fastened to the doorpost by a rope of colored strands.

Selecting the softest and smoothest stones for seats, Elsie and I sat amidst the crowding children, babies, pigs, and chickens. There was an intermingling of sweet and sour odors belonging to the fullness of all forms of life in the sunny fecundity of a tropical coast village.

Abruptly, from the floor of the rancho, came a lusty cry which is the same in any language, and one of the girls laughingly ran to fetch a kicking coffee-colored infant that was loudly demanding to have its little belly warmed with its mother's milk. Francisca, without leaving her loom, took the child and placed it at her flowing breast. She showed us with pride the little blue mark on its backside called the Mongolian stain—the mark of pure Indian blood. Francisca nursed her child so often that I decided, instead of painting the weaving, to paint the interlude.

Elsie, to amuse the children, sang a little song and tried to make them sing it after her. But while they listened attentively, they would not sing, and it is the strangest fact that I have never heard an Indian sing.

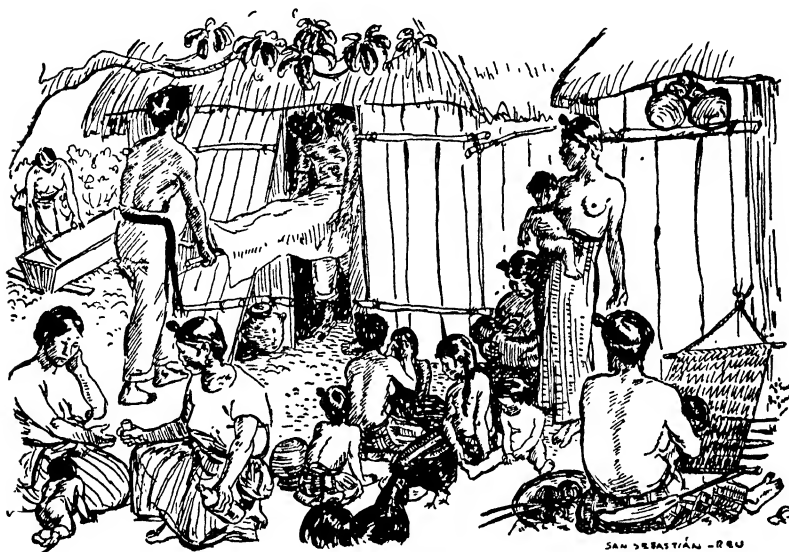
Although they were mesmerized by the collection of pencils, brushes, tubes of paint, and other things in my paintbox, they were much too well brought up to touch them. The silvery glitter of the nickel-plated hip flask in which I carried my water made their eyes pop. But the young man whom I asked to fill it for me, showed his sophistication in the ways of the white man by asking, "With water?"



Suddenly a long, swinging wail, rising in a wavering crescendo, the bitter cry of a soul in pain, issued from the next rancho only five or six feet away, chilling our blood and making our flesh creep. The children giggled and Francisca went on placidly nursing her baby. The excruciating swinging wail was repeated again and again and then ended abruptly in a heart-rending sob. By this time Elsie and I were limp and trembling, but the Indians were incredibly unmoved.

I appealed to Francisca for an explanation.

"It is a woman mourning her husband," she said simply.



It was the first time I had heard the Indian death wail. I was unstrung by the note of desolation in that grief-stricken cry, but I learned later that women who are good at wailing are often employed for the purpose. The Indians have a great fear of death, it is said, and their fearsome wailing is as much an incantation against the death-bringer, as an expression of passionate grief.

A group of women came into the yard and passed a bottle of *aguardiente* among themselves. A while later we saw a new white pine coffin borne on the shoulders of three men pass outside the hedge.

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"Good heavens!" Elsie gasped. "Don't tell me they're bringing it in here."

But that was exactly what they were doing. They set the coffin down outside the rancho, and while they went inside, one of the women swept it clean with a native palm broom. I don't think we realized until then that the corpse was still in the house of mourning. A moment later the men came out again bearing a stretcher upon which lay the dead man covered with a gaily striped red and white *sábana*. The bereaved wife followed carrying a few articles of clothing, probably the deceased's only earthly possessions. These were rolled up and placed in the coffin to pillow the head of the corpse. And then the three men again shouldered the coffin and, followed by the women, left the yard and went to a larger rancho across the street, possibly the home of a relative, where the *velorio*, or wake, would be held during the night with marimba music, feasting, drinking, and dancing. I have heard of wakes which developed into such drunken orgies that the corpse was completely forgotten for more than a week and would not have been brought to mind even then if someone had not complained to the authorities.

I continued my painting, and before I had finished, the young husband we had interviewed in our search for a bridal costume came to tell me that his wife, Josefa, had got her costume back and would be willing to pose in it for me the following afternoon. This surprising news showed how completely we had broken the ice in San Sebastián.

Josefa in her bridal finery was an exquisite lace-bedecked terra cotta doll. Under her flowing veil she wore an immense ball of tufted purple silk held in place upon her brow by a long *cinta* of the same color wound about her head. Her blouse was made of tier on tier of fine lace, and her *chachal* or necklace, was an heirloom of ancient Spanish silver coins and crucifixes. The broad rainbow-hued bands of her silk *corte* were varied by intricate designs, and the belt that supplemented the usual sure-fast twist had in the middle a large purple ball exactly like the one over her forehead. She stood as stiffly as an image on her tiny bare feet, and in her right hand she held a bouquet of lilies of the valley.

In this costume, with its Christian symbols of chastity incon-

gruously superimposed upon native barbaric splendor, poor Josefa was clearly very uncomfortable. It was probably the second time in her life that she had willingly put on a blouse. The first time she had been little more than a child. But now she had a child of her own, and the breasts under the bridal lace were no longer virginal, but swollen hard with milk and aching for soft sucking baby lips. The young husband paced the floor with the baby, seeking to quiet it with gentle pats on its little fesses.

Two doorways on the street and one on the yard, dimly illumined the one-room rancho. The dingy whitewashed walls were bare, and a seldom used bench and chair and a crude table holding a statuette of the Virgin and Child about summed up the furniture. Three large stones forming a rough triangle in the middle of the stamped-earth floor were the fireplace, and smoke from the smoldering coals stung our eyes as it wreathed toward the open eaves which took the place of a chimney.

The room swarmed with playing children who kept Elsie on tenterhooks for fear they would knock over my paints. Passers-by in the street paused in the doorways to watch, and time and again we had to ask them to stand aside as they obscured the all-too-feeble light.

A split second after she was through posing, Josefa tore off the binding bridal blouse and with an immense sigh of relief, gave the breast to her baby.

In an earlier chapter I have told how a handsome Indian woman almost brained me with a well-aimed stone because she feared I had the evil eye. This incident had a sequel that might have given me a feeling of satisfaction were I a revengeful man, which I am not.

Julia Mezger had a beautiful San Cristóbal costume. The finely woven *cinta* was of pure silk and had a profusion of silk pompons dangling from the ends. The rich floral design on the *guipil* appeared to be embroidery but was actually pure weaving, and the *corte* was of such fine cotton you would have taken it for silk.

I wanted to get a pure-blooded highland Indian woman to pose in this dress for me, and asked Don Conrado if it were possible to fill such an order on the *finca*.

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"Sure," he said. "There's a good-looking Indian girl named Otilia in the coffee-sorting room, and she's from San Cristóbal."

But Otilia was not to be found among the coffee sorters.

"Wouldn't you know it?" growled Don Conrado. "That girl thinks she's a queen or something. If she feels like coming to work, she comes; if she doesn't, she doesn't. She's always flirting or fighting, and makes more trouble than all the other *mozos*' wives put together. She's the Jezebel of Buena Vista."

I began to form a mental picture of Otilia that was irresistible. None of the other Indian girls would do.

"But can we get Otilia?" I asked.

"Sure we can get her."

"But how?"

"I'll have her arrested."

"On what charge?"

"Say! With a woman like that, her conscience will supply the charge!"

When Carl brought Otilia in, her handsome features were clouded with wrath, but they cleared with instant comprehension when she saw me. I hid the fact that I recognized her at once as the woman who had stoned me four months ago, and both of us tactfully avoided any reference to our first encounter.

Unusually tall for an Indian, Otilia, with her sinuous, hipless grace of body, was an object of bright beauty in the full festal dress of her people.

Thinking only of the best light, I posed her on the front *corredor*. But she was unaccountably restive and became so contrary that we settled down to a grim contest of wills that is manifest in the expression of her portrait.

At noon she said she must go home to get her husband's lunch, and then I learned what had been on her mind all morning; for she told Doña Leonore that the passing *mozos* who had seen her posing had made rough jokes as to what would happen to her when her husband heard about it.

"He will beat me," she said fearfully.

"If he touches you, I will put him in jail. Tell him that," Don Conrado said reassuringly.

I told her that when she came back in the afternoon I would pose her in the *corredor* on the patio, where she would be free

from observation, but I was surprised that she actually returned. Her eyes were red from crying, and she said that her husband had beaten her with his machete. But I detected a note of pride in the way she said it, for the very fury of her mate's jealousy was a gauge of his love for her!

All too soon the day came to bid the Mezgers good-by, and to return to the capital.

We took an apartment at Chalet Hegel in the beautiful residential suburb of Santa Clara. The great house stood amidst several acres of lawns and flower beds, where the jacarandas and poinsettias were beginning to bloom, reminding us of the nearness of Christmas. Lovely shell lilies screened the swimming pool by the side of the house from view. Every day the sky was a blue bowl, as unclouded as our happiness.

Elsie complained of a dry, itchy scalp.

"I think I shall go into town and get an oil shampoo," she said as soon as we were settled.

At the beauty parlor she received the shock of her life.

"Madame," said the hairdresser, "you haven't got a dry scalp; you have *piojos*!"

The hairdresser relentlessly held one out on her thumbnail for Elsie to see, and then cracked it with her other nail.

"I've seen the Indians do that, but never thought it could happen to me," cried Elsie with flaming cheeks. "How terrible!"

Her cheeks were still flaming when she met me afterward at the home of friends and painfully blurted out the news. Of course, everyone razzed her frightfully, although they assured her that in Guatemala to have *piojos* or to be put in jail were two things to which disgrace was not necessarily attached.

The opening of my exhibition at the National Academy was now only a few days off and, although I had a stomach "disorder" that kept me from attending a luncheon given by the artists for Carlos Merida, who was in the capital for a couple of days, I went into town daily to attend to the necessary details. *El Imparcial* announced the exhibition with a front-page story together with five reproductions of my paintings under the headline: "Pictorial Exhibition Which Will Be a Feast For the Spirit."

## XXVIII

I Am

Hung and

Almost Die

**O**N THE DAY of my hanging, two of the best native doctors gave me only one chance in a hundred to live. For on that day I underwent an operation for a gangrenous appendix, and it was found that peritonitis had set in.

The doctors were Mariano Lopez and Lizardo Estrada, the latter performing the operation at his private maternity hospital in the Guarda Viejo.

Before there were automobiles, the building now occupied by the Casa de Salud de Dr. Estrada, was a beer garden reached by a branch-line railroad and was a popular resort for people from the capital. A pavilion in the larger of the two flower-filled patios is a pleasant reminder of the time when the garden rang with jolly laughter instead of cries of pain.

Today Guarda Viejo is a densely settled, squalid section divided by the broad Avenida Simon Bolivar, said to be the busiest thoroughfare in Central America. When I was recuperating, I loved to sit and watch the herds of fat cattle from the coastal grazing lands being driven to the auction pens by vaqueros with spurred bare heels; the creaking, wooden-wheeled oxcarts and tawdry native taxis; the shiny new cars and popping motor bicycles, which have become the rage; the trotting Indian women from Mixco with head baskets filled with new-laid eggs, warm

*tortillas*, and seasick chickens; and the flower women from San Juan and San Pedro. *Camionetas* or buses with strange names jogged by. There was, for instance, one called "*Mujer sin corazon*"—"Heartless Woman." But this, I think, was topped by "*Arrancame la vida*"—"Take My Life." Not bad for one of these mad little buses which nearly kill you with their jiggling, wrenching, and sudden stops.

Next door to the hospital was a barracks. I could hear the mule on the other side of my wall munching its oats and jerking on its halter rope. Swarms of flies came from feasting in the stables to sun themselves in the hospital *corredors* or to take refuge from the midday heat in my room.

Elsie had a cot moved into my room, and her devotion was so perfect the nurses didn't believe she was my wife.

Although it was some time before I was permitted to see anyone, flowers poured in from friends until my room resembled an arbor, and many came to the hospital to talk with Elsie, to help her in kind and thoughtful ways, and to bring news of my exhibition which had taken the city by storm.

As soon as I felt a little better, I began to weigh the chances of seeing my show before it closed, but Dr. Lopez said, "You should be thankful that you will see your next exhibition."

None of the three nurses could speak English. The head nurse was a fat, lazy, careless, elderly *ladina* with a thin black mustache and a motherly coquettish manner. All in one day she caused my bed to be drenched by a loosely stoppered hot-water bottle, administered the wrong injection, and gave me a glassful of hydrochloric acid where the doctor had ordered sips between bites of food. The first two gulps laid me out cold, and when I regained my senses and my temper I flung at her, "You don't deserve to be head nurse. You do everything wrong." Without answering, she turned away and left the room, a rather pathetic figure, I thought. But a short time later she returned with Jesús, the eighteen-year-old student nurse. They had exchanged caps.

"You said I do everything wrong, so we have traded places," she said, a gleam of mischief in her eye.

It was impossible to remain in a huff.

The housekeeper was the gaudiest liar I have ever known. Her official title was *ama de las llaves*, or mistress of the keys, but

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the nurses called her with grim humor *La Mujer de San Pedro*—The Wife of St. Peter!

Every time she brought my tray, she told me a new tale about herself. Day by day she built up a romance of which she was the heroine. As a young and innocent girl, she said, she had married a wealthy but, as it proved, bestial and cruel *finquero*, who had shut her away from the world in his *casa grande* high up in the mountains of the Alta Vera Paz. Daily he invented exquisite new tortures to make her unhappy. Finally he brought his mistress—an ugly old crone—to live under their roof, and set this foul woman above her. This was more than human pride could endure, and taking only the clothes on her back, she stole away on a mule under cover of night, down from that vicious eyrie. But now, after all her suffering, she had found love in the person of a young lawyer in Guatemala City, whom she was soon going to marry. I was so happy over this joyous crowning of her life of woe that I wanted to give her a diamond tiara, at least, for a wedding gift. And then I discovered the whole story was a classic of fancy fibbing.

The hospital fare was really good, being prepared under the eye of the aged German mother-in-law of Dr. Estrada. I was almost literally given everything I wanted, but one day I developed a craving for frogs' legs and not being able to think of the Spanish word for frog, I asked St. Peter's wife what little animal had *piernas sabrosas*—delicious legs. With quick wit, she answered, "*La mujer*—woman!"

Through my association with Guatemalan artists I had picked up a good deal of local slang, and sometimes slang words popped out when the proper Spanish expression wouldn't come. This led me to make a "break" that became famous in the capital. Wanting, for a change, some breast of chicken, I asked for *chiches de pollo*. St. Peter's wife gave a surprised guffaw and fled, and soon the whole hospital was rocking with laughter.

When Dr. Lopez came to see me he was shaking with amusement. He said, "I hear you asked for chicken tits!"

I was now well enough to have my bed wheeled out into the sunshine of the *corredor*. How good it was to feel the blessed warmth of the sun and to see the blue patch of sky above the flowered patio! I would lie all morning watching the *sopilotes*



wheeling gracefully above, and with as much of myself as possible exposed to the healing actinic rays of the eternally summer-like sun. The nurses for whom white flesh seemed to have a certain charm—Elsie wondered why it required all three of them to bathe me in the morning—could not understand why I wanted to become brown like themselves.

But despite the warm June-like days, December nights were bitterly cold. The doctors appeared in overcoats, and the night nurse went about with chattering teeth.

Elsie, undismayed by the strangeness of a foreign capital, used the complicated bus system, shopped, called on friends, and visited my exhibition at the National Academy, which continued to attract large numbers up to the closing date, when it was all but sold out. Wherever she gave her name, people spoke of having seen my pictures and asked after me. The scenes and the language were strange, but not the people.

She would return to the hospital agog. The things to be seen on the buses and in the streets, interesting at any time, had become triply so with the approach of Christmas.

The head baskets of the vividly clad market women from the outlying villages were filled with great garlands of green pine needles, huge bunches of poinsettias, scarlet *pie-de-gallos*, branches of small bright yellow gourds called *chiches* because of their breast-like shape, and string upon string of bead-like *manzanillas*—holiday decorations for residence and rancho alike. The prosaic buses were aflame with *pie-de-gallos*, while strings of shining yellow *manzanillas* were festooned between the windows and interspersed with pine branches.

"You should have seen an Indian woman getting on a crowded bus with a baby hanging on her back and on her head a basket with a live turkey, a bunch of air plants, a pineapple, some berries wrapped in a big leaf, and a few oranges," Elsie said. "She put them on the floor with a lot of other baskets all filled like hers and you could hardly get on or off the bus without tripping over them.

"All over town you see Indian servants in their gay dresses trotting through the streets delivering gifts wrapped in bright Christmas paper. There was even a Santa Claus in a children's shop! And the flowers in the market! There are just heaped-up

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bunches of roses, carnations, lilies, poinsettias, and all sorts of native plants and gourds. It's all so Christmasy in spite of the springlike weather."

She said wistfully that Don Carlos Hegel, *bijo*, the landlord of the house in Santa Clara where we had gone to live on our return to the capital, had bought a big blond turkey and was fattening it in the patio for our Christmas dinner. "Won't it be fun to have Christmas dinner in our own Guatemalan home!" she cried.

On the day before Christmas, Dr. Estrada asked, "*Como se siente*—how do you feel?"

"*Pollón*—like a big chicken!" I said, beating my chest with bravado. "Do you think I can go home?"

He smiled and shook his head, but promised that I would be able to eat turkey dinner with Elsie.

Elsie had gone into town to send out presents, and the Deane Wells had kindly placed their house and servants at her disposal. When she came back, her air of excitement told me that she had seen something unusual.

"I've just seen a turkey as drunk as a lord," she said. "Yes, really. It seems to be an old Guatemalan custom to get the turkey tipsy before they kill it. Relaxes the muscles and makes the meat tenderer, Deane says. And it was such a beautiful bird, coal black with a scarlet neck, and a very unwilling whisky drinker. An Indian boy held its mouth open while the Indian cook poured the whisky down its throat, a little at a time. The poor turkey gargled and tried to spit it out, but the boy stroked its neck and that seemed to help the liquor down. And when they let it go you should have seen it dance, advance and retreat, exactly like the Indians do, only they say the Indians copied their steps from the *chompipes*. The patio garden was strewn with poinsettias, air plants, and pine needle garlands to decorate the house with, and there was the Christmas dinner dancing amid the trimmings! It was terribly amusing and also a little sad. I didn't stay for the killing—I couldn't."

Most Guatemaltecos buy their turkeys from the Indians about two weeks before Christmas and fatten them up in their kitchen patios. A fourteen-pound turkey can be bought alive for a dollar

and a quarter, whereas the same bird killed and dressed would come to three dollars and a half in the market.

Another unusual Christmas custom of the country which had interested Elsie immensely was the preparation of the *Nacimientos* in nearly every home. These were stagelike representations of the Nativity, and some were on such an elaborate scale that they took up the entire end of a room, or a whole alcove, with their miniature mountains, trees, buildings, Lilliputian figures and animals, and streams and fountains of real water. The Indians delight in making tiny effigies of themselves to people the scenes, and sell them from house to house.

On Christmas Eve, while our friends were making merry in their homes and clubs and in the hotels, the Indians and ladinos of the Guarda Viejo were dancing in the cantinas and in the streets to the rattling music of marimbas. The music and sounds of merrymaking and, it almost seemed, the fumes of *aguardiente* filled the patios of the hospital. At midnight pandemonium broke loose with the maniacal clanging of church bells underscoring a bombardment of giant crackers and the frightful Indian rockets which give no light but shatter the sky with their violent explosions. We knew that people were now flocking to the churches and especially to the cathedral for the beautiful Christmas Eve mass, after which they would go places for coffee or hot chocolate and tamales.

The Indians, however, kept up their noisy festivities all through the night. Having once got the festival spirit in their blood, nothing could stop them so long as the *aguardiente* and fireworks lasted. Great crowds filled the Avenida Simon Bolivar on Christmas Day. Elsie said there were two marimbas in front of the hospital—it sounded like six—and by way of entertainment there was a procession led by two men and a girl mounted on horses. Their faces were painted and they wore silver crowns and satin cloaks in brilliant green, red, and yellow—costumes which seemed to signify little more than a love of disguise. There was a dance which I suppose must be called the Dance of the Conquistadors, for Elsie described the performers as wearing pink-cheeked, gilt-bearded wooden masks set at snooty angles, long golden curls, and hats, cloaks, jackets, and knee-breeches

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of velvet, heavily covered with gilt braid and fringe, mirrors, and plumes. Their legs were encased in white cotton stockings and their feet cramped into shoes that would leave them crippled for weeks afterward. Without laughter or gaiety, the fantastic dance, reminiscent of the dance of the tipsy turkey, went on hour after hour, to the ceaseless accompaniment of the marimbas.

In the morning Dr. Estrada gave me a hypodermic injection which induced a ravenous appetite. At dinner time a table for Elsie was set beside my bed, Saint Peter's Wife served the savory roast turkey with rich gravy and cranberry sauce, and thus we celebrated Christmas in a little native maternity hospital far from home. Like many an incautious starved man before whom is put more food than is good for him, I ate like a glutton. It almost killed me, but it was worth it.

For weeks the nights in Guarda Viejo were made hideous by the firing of crackers and rockets. It would have been enough to endure if I had been in perfect health; in my weakened condition it was torture. But to the nurses the sound of bursting rockets was *muy alegre*—very gay. And with a people whose favorite way of commemorating any event, civil or religious, is *tirando cobetes*—shooting of rockets—it was impossible to argue that there should at least be a zone of quiet around a hospital.

On the first night after Elsie left the hospital to rest from her long weary vigil, Demetria, the most efficient and attractive of the nurses, lingered by my bedside with an air of unusual solicitude. She smoothed my pillow, turned the leaves of the magazine I was reading—it was a Mexican publication which reprinted in Spanish horror and mystery tales from American periodicals—and cuddled so close to me that I began to suspect she was inviting me to make love to her. When the cat's away. . . . But suddenly, with peals of laughter, St. Peter's Wife and Jesús pounced into the room. It was all a playful conspiracy against my moral rectitude.

As soon as I was able to leave my bed for a wheel chair, the doctor ordered me to wear a surgical belt, and Elsie asked a shop to send one to the hospital. Misled by the address, the shop sent on approval a selection of maternity corsets.

Whenever a new patient came to the hospital, all the relatives came too. And if ever a crisis developed in the middle of the

night, relatives seemed to materialize out of the thin air. Dr. Lopez told me that when he first returned to Guatemala to practice, he lost many cases because he insisted on turning his patient's relatives out of the sick room and throwing open the windows to let in the light and air. He still encounters opposition to his heresies.

After being in the Casa de Salud one month to the day, I was able to go to our house in Santa Clara, where I remained under Dr. Lopez' care for yet another month. The same spirit of kindness and hospitality that had kept my room filled with flowers, and Elsie and myself cheered by daily visits and thoughtful services, now found expression in many invitations to recuperate on various *fincas*.



## XXIX

### Three

### Fincas

WE ARRIVED at San Luis, the first of the three *fincas* we were to visit on a bright afternoon early in February. The dry season was officially at its height but there had been sufficient rain to freshen the foliage and to make the flowers burst forth with the exaggerated fecundity of the tropics. Everywhere, in garden and on mountain slope, there was that curious commingling of temperate and tropical vegetation—twisted oak and stern pine with gaily flowering trees and shrubs—that makes the *boca costa* seemed an enchanted never-never land.

The *casa grande*, built of termite-proof California redwood, is situated on the brink of a precipitous slope. From the broad veranda we could look down by day upon the coastal flats, patched here and there by the bright green of cane and banana plantations, and the shining expanse of the Pacific, oddly tilted upon the horizon; while at night we could see the twinkling lights of Puerto San José marking the coast line twenty miles away.

In former times San Luis yielded large crops of cane and coffee, but today its wealth is in its water power. For through the narrow, mountain-walled valley in which the *finsa* lies, rages a tropical river whose boiling, hissing, bubbling waters, dashing down from the mountains in foaming cascades and thundering

falls, have been harnessed by the Empresa Electrica to provide power and light for the capital.

Don Ernesto Schaeffer, president of the Empresa Electrica, upon whose invitation we had come to San Luis, did not come down during our stay, our actual hosts being the genial American *administrador*, Harry Wheeler, and his charming Spanish wife. The Wheelers have two lovely children who favor their mother and speak English with a pretty Spanish accent. Two parrots, which the servants had taught to sing *La Cucuracha* in unison, and three shaggy airedales completed the ménage.

On a terrace above the house was a tree-shaded swimming pool fed by sparkling spring water in which we cooled off after hot tramps, while another interesting feature of the estate was a large stone cropping out of the lawn upon which could unmistakably be traced the carved features of a Mayan deity, showing that there may have been a settlement in this spot in prehistoric times.

We occupied a guest house set in a fragrant garden apart from the *casa grande*. If we chanced to be at home, the servants brought us *frescoes* at eleven in the morning, and four-thirty in the afternoon, but we ate our meals with the Wheelers, whose table was so bountifully supplied with good American dishes and (what seemed a miracle in Guatemala) rich cream and cheese that we both gained weight despite our exertions in the burning heat.

In the joy of being able to use my legs and paints once more, I quite forgot that I was supposed to take it easy for a while. On our first morning we set out on foot for the waterfall. Two of the airedales came with us. Our way led through open *potreros* or cattle fields, under the scorching sun, and we were glad to reach the shady path by the river, to see it glinting through the scented shrubbery and to hear the cool rush of waters over the blue boulders.

At length we heard the smothered roar of the falls, and a moment later we were standing in admiration and spray upon the misty rim of the well of greenery into which the waters plunge to a depth of one hundred and fifty feet. A shaft of sunshine fell like a dazzling searchlight upon the top of the falls where the waters shot over the rocks to catapult in hissing, crash-

ing jets into the boiling cauldron below. The rocky walls, hung with quaking, dewy ferns, seemed to tremble with the perpetual pounding of those crystal battering rams. From where we stood in a light rain of mist, we could only stare in wonder. In order to find a drier place to paint we descended by a rotten, slippery trail to the bottom. On our way down we heard a great splashing and flapping of wings and saw scores of *sopilotes* bathing in the springs that gushed from the cliffside and perching themselves on sunlit ledges with wings spread out to dry, a sight which somewhat lessened our distaste for these repulsive-looking creatures.

Crawling out on a huge boulder with the water splashing at my feet but out of reach of the spray from the falls, I painted all morning, seeking to express the force of the falls, the delicacy of the mist, the beauty of the tracery of tropical foliage and the grandeur of the whole. Then we climbed up the crumbling perpendicular trail and walked home through the pastures under the full weight of the vertical sun.

The proximity of San Luis to Palín, and the possibility of reaching that interesting Indian village by train, made it convenient for us to go there several times. The Palín Hill must have been a nightmare to the engineers who built the railway; for the road doubles upon itself to such an extent that in going north or south you mostly travel east and west, and it has a 3-per-cent grade—almost the limit of safety—so that two engines are required to haul up a train consisting of no more than four cars.

There is always a swarm of market women awaiting the arrival of the train at Palín. Competition is keen. The women run back and forth under the windows, while some even board the train and go through the aisles crying "*Care piñas? Care papaya?*" Their baskets are filled with all manner of tempting edibles: sugar pineapples, *mameys*, *anonas*, *zapotes*, papayas, fried chicken on banana leaves, and candy in gaily painted wooden boxes. The cleanliness of the women inspires confidence. They are an attractive race, proud and spirited, and their costume, with its short white *guipil*, wide scarlet sash, and long blue *corte* pleated in back in a style peculiar to Palín, is one of the prettiest and daintiest in Guatemala. They twine red, salmon, or blue



ribbons into their long black hair which they wear in the form of a coronet. Their jewelry consists of *chachales* or necklaces, of red and blue beads, and hand-wrought gold ear bobs. Every woman carries a large square white *servilleta* decorated with a light design of red and blue birds and dots—the most charming single item in the whole range of Indian textiles.

From the station which, strange to say, is the most modern in the country, we had a walk of a quarter of a mile through the village up to the plaza. Here we saw the superlative in *ceibas*—a centuries-old tree with a limb spread of one hundred and eighty feet! Several hundred market women squatted or stood before their wares in its luxuriant shade. Beyond the noble *ceiba* stood the handsome church, the morning sun shading the broad flight of steps and the façade, which was tinted pink, white, and baby blue in pale echo of the dominant hues of the village costume.

It is interesting to note the various uses of the *servilleta*. For it not only serves as a portable cradle which may be slung fore or aft according to the needs of the tiny cedar-skinned occupant; the *servilleta* is also used as a carrying cloth, a display cloth, a



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light shoulder cape as a protection against the chill north wind, or as a basket covering to keep out the dust. Often you see a dignified looking woman of Palín with a tall basket of pineapples balanced upon her head and draped with a beautiful *servilleta*, like the headdress of a duchess.

There is an infinite variety to an Indian market that makes it one of the most fascinating sights in the world to watch or to sketch. On the tawny earth between the rows of vividly dressed venders is spread the strangest variety of merchandise imaginable: exotic fruits and vegetables, bunches of blinking chickens lying in the dust with bound legs, fresh-killed meat in screened boxes, carved and painted gourd *jícaras* and *guacales*, glazed and unglazed earthen pottery, fanciful terra cotta figurines, baked earth *comals* and bubble-shaped *tinajas* or water jars, and tumbled masses of hideous live iguanas, like small Chinese dragons, with scaled bodies, long spiky tails, and a dorsal ruff like a tattered banana leaf. Their vicious-looking mouths are sewed up to make them harmless, but their beady reptilian eyes regard the world that is about to consign them to the stew pot with a contemptuous malevolent stare. We watched an Indian woman buy one, calmly pick it up by the scruff of the neck, twine the long tail about her arm, and walk off with it as if it were the most matter-of-fact purchase.

Elsie bought some luscious-looking sugar pineapples from a young Indian girl who was so captivated by the large sun hat Elsie was wearing that she reached for it to try on her own head. But Elsie, having had one experience with *piojos*, was taking no chances on another, and snatched it back. Wounded by the implication of uncleanness, the poor child asked us to look at her much-washed shiny black hair to see that it was uninhabited. "We are clean," she said, proudly including her whole village. "Only the women of Santa Maria de Jesús have *piojitos*!"

Santa Maria de Jesús is an Indian village perched high up on a shoulder of the volcano of Agua. A large contingent of market women from this village come to Palín, especially for the big Wednesday and Sunday markets; and so great is the rivalry between the two tribes and the disdain of the women of Palín for their less cleanly neighbors, that when the railroad once tried

the experiment of running a special market train from Palín to the capital, the Palineras demanded that a separaté car—a sort of Jim Crow car—be assigned to the women of Santa Maria de Jesús.

In spite of this low opinion of their character, the Santa Maria women caught our eye even in the Palín plaza. Their costume is a rich harmony of reds and blues, and their headdress is very striking.

I sketched in the market all morning, often impeded by the interest the Indians took in my work and their inability to understand that I needed to see what I painted and could not do so when they gathered in a wall in front of me. I wished to understand their sprightly-seeming comments made in their own liquid idiom, but although I asked several ladinos what they were saying, I got only a shrug to the effect they were as much in the dark as myself.

Painting was further made difficult by the clouds of dust raised by the strong north winds which at this time of year sweep through the Palín pass as through the blowpipe of a bellows. Then about midday several carloads of Clark's Tours tourists blew in, and the market was temporarily disrupted by Leica lensmen and women souvenir seekers who snatched at the Indians' *servilletas* as if nothing could be sacred to the poor aborigines.

We had brought a basket lunch and intended picnicking by the beautiful falls from which comes the village Indian name, Palín (Standing Water) but in wandering through the narrow lanes, bordered by primitive corn palings, thatched adobe ranchos, and flowery hedges, we came upon a sun-swept rocky gorge, which was the setting for a scene of unparalleled interest. A hundred jets of crystalline spring water spurted from the rocky walls, as though Moses had but passed through the gorge and indulged in an orgy of rock-smiting. Around every spring the stones had been laid to form a circular sunken bath, and in every bath were groups of women and children washing their clothes, their hair, and themselves, while over the hot boulders were spread countless gay garments to dry. The pattern of colors and shapes, the brilliancy of the light reflected from the rocks and water, the warm sweet smell of drying wash, the

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murmur and movement, and the beauty of glistening bronzy bodies was overwhelming.

We ate lunch in a patch of shade, and thinking that we had given the bathers and *lavanderas* time to get used to our presence, I commenced to paint, while Elsie knitted a few more rows of her famous blue muffler. But before long angry looks were shot at us, and one of the women, using a great boulder as an improvised rostrum, delivered a tirade, the intent of which was only too clear, although we could not understand a word. As we paid little attention to her, she eventually went away. It developed, however, that she had gone to the plaza to complain to the *comandante*; for in a short while three blue-uniformed soldiers came dashing over the rocks with ropes ready to arrest us. When they saw how quietly we were employed, however, they were considerably embarrassed. The *caporal*, fumbling with his rope, watched me paint for a moment, then saluted us respectfully, and, with his men, went back to report to a doubtlessly amused *comandante*.

Thus a week went by and the time came to say good-bye to the Wheelers, whose many kindnesses we can never forget, and to take the train for Escuintla, that hotspot of *tierra caliente*. There we were met by a car from El Zapote and driven up to the *finca*, three thousand feet high upon the gullied slope of the active volcano of Fuego with its ominous plume of white smoke.

At the end of an hour's driving, we swung under a big *ceiba* and through the entrance gates of El Zapote. Carmen and Lind Pettersen and their Norse-blond daughter Sylvia welcomed us to the most beautiful and picturesque *finca* we know of in all Guatemala. The rambling one-story white plaster house, formerly a stable, with its front *corredor* screened by poinsettias and magenta-blossomed bougainvillea and its back *corredor* opening upon flower-filled patios and playing fountains, preserves the spirit of colonial Guatemala.

While all *fincas* have numbers of dogs and cats and usually a parrot or two, the pets on El Zapote constituted an amazing menagerie. There were four dogs, ranging in size from an aire-dale pup to a huge Great Dane; several cats, including an idiot Persian; a family of peacocks, a guinea hen, and a duck de-

servedly named Donald; a parrot and a macaw and a flock of pigeons; a turtle, a *pizote* or coatimundi, and a spotted fawn named Nippy. Even this list is partial. The *casa grande* was a modern Noah's Ark.

Nippy, the fawn, made a terrible inroad into our hearts with her big melting eyes, graceful spotted body, spindling legs, and tiny tap-dancing cloven ebony hooves. Early in the morning while we were still lying abed, we would hear her enter our room like a child tap dancer and then feel her moist muzzle and emery tongue on our face or hands. She would let us stroke her tawny silken coat and would eat bougainvillea blossoms out of our hands. Often at mealtime we would be startled by the touch of her tongue and look down to see the beautiful little fawn wandering about under the table.

In the cool of our first evening at El Zapote we went out with Carmen to inspect the *finca*. On a corner post of the wet *beneficio* patio we observed a sunglass for recording the hours of sunlight each day. Across from the *beneficio* was a former sugarcane mill, now used for storing coffee. The immense brick chimney was still standing, and the sky above it was blackened by swirling clouds of swallows. We were watching their aerial maneuvers when suddenly, as if at a signal from a leader, they dropped swiftly into the chimney in dense numbers like smoke reversing its direction. Carmen told us that once they had ringed a thousand of the birds, and had made the discovery that they came from California! This was their winter home.

The rancheria was a revelation to us, for instead of the usual bare beehive arrangement of ranchos it resembled what I am tempted to call an ideal Indian village. The Pettersens, with their strong sympathy for the Indians and their remarkable sensitivity to the traditions of the country, have sought to give their *mozos* better living conditions, not by attempting to make over their life on a foreign pattern, but by working with them and trying to grasp their peculiar needs and to understand their personal feelings. As a result, the three hundred and fifty stoutly built tiled ranchos are scattered about along meandering lanes in unison with the Indians' love of disorder. Every rancho has its own plot of ground, fenced off by fragrant flowering hedges, filled with mangoes, plátanos, and other tropical fruit trees and

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clean-swept looking despite the inevitable swarm of scantily clad coppery babies and domesticated animals. A certain amount of land is allotted to every *colono* for a milpa and there are also pastures for the four hundred head of cattle owned by the Indians. In order to share these privileges the *mozos* or a relative must occupy their rancho all year.

Some of the newest ranchos were being built of stone and were very good-looking, but before proceeding with any innovation the Pettersens always allow time to get the Indians' reaction, for they have learned that what might seem to them a desirable change is sometimes most unwelcome to the *mozos*; as for instance the unfortunate experiment in separate kitchens. To the white man, one of the most deplorable features of Indian homes is the open fireplace in the middle of the floor. But when the Pettersens sought to remedy this primitive condition by building outside kitchens, they found that the Indians did not like it and for two good reasons. First, the woman objected because it removed her from the family circle and made her feel like a servant, and second, because the smoke from the open fire served the useful purpose of keeping out mosquitoes and other pests.

We admired the pretty white chapel in the center of the rancheria, pictorially enhanced by two dark pines, among whose branches the *sopilotes* perpetually perched. The Indians were building wooden platforms and a cage of narrow slats big enough for a man, and Carmen told us that they were preparing for the fiesta of the Virgin, in which the cage would be used for a strange performance called the dance of Napoleon! Like most Indian dances, it is a survival of the effort of the early padres to teach the aborigines in dramatic form the religion, history, and morals of the whites. The Indians, who probably never understood anything of their meaning, have kept the dances from their childish love of show. One of their rarest dances is that of Vice and Virtue, the only one in which a woman ever takes part. The lady represents Vice while a man dressed as a priest personifies Virtue, but the Indians being wonderfully ignorant of the moral significance, erroneously permit Vice to triumph!

The only straight street in the rancheria has at one end a small oratory, oriented so that when the Indians finish their devotions

and face about they see framed at the other end of the wide tree-bordered thoroughfare a magnificent view of the symmetrical cone of Agua. Carmen assured us that this plan originated with the Indians, who perhaps feel the spiritual significance of that heavenward-pointing finger.

Carmen Pettersen is a very fine water-colorist, with the mastery of tone and solid technique of one who has studied in England. Our week at El Zapote turned into an art-fest, for every day Carmen and I painted from interesting models who came down from Monterrey, an annex ten miles distant peopled by Indians from Itzapa and far-off Rabinal, and Elsie painted two beautiful compositions from a spray of candelaria orchids and a spiky *balyconia* or wild plátano. She regretted that it was too late to get a Monja Blanca, Guatemala's snow-white orchid and national flower, to pose for her.

Carmen, perfectly mimicking the singsong speech and clipped accent of our Indian models, kept up a running fire of gossip to amuse them and prevent them becoming strained or restless. I marveled that the dual effort of painting and entertaining did not exhaust her. It was wonderful how completely she made the Indians forget that she was *la patrona*, different, superior, other than simply a good neighbor. An eavesdropper would have sworn that mistress and models were a group of Indians "sharpening their scissors," as gossiping is called in Guatemala.

A good Indian is always a proud Indian, Carmen said, and she treated those who merited it with consideration and respect. Once when some models arrived so late that we had already begun to paint from substitutes, she sent them back with presents to salve their feelings.

It is not unusual for an Indian mother to want to pay for the specially prepared milk given away through the dispensary to delicate babies, although in one instance a woman was found selling the milk thus obtained. She did not want her child and was shrewdly capitalizing its infirmity. Cases of Indians letting their girl babies die or of suffocating them at the breast, multiply in hard times, when girls no longer bring a good price, and may even be unable to find a husband. We heard that ideas of birth control are filtering through the *fincas*. But mother love is

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strong among the Indians. Carmen told us of a bereft mother who came to the dispensary for medicine "to take away her sorrow."

Indians seem to be born kleptomaniacs. Even with the most reliable servants, the silverware has to be kept under lock and key. Coffee has a way of disappearing from the sorting room. And so it goes. They have no sense of guilt in taking a little where there is seeming abundance. The Pettersens found that whatever they planted in a certain field, not visible from the house, was taken by the *mozos*. Accepting the situation, they set out pineapples expecting them to be stolen. The scheme was far from philanthropical, for they knew the *mozos* would bring them the ripe fruit at a tenth of the cost of raising it themselves!

Our models had only the vaguest notion of what we were doing while we were painting them and were always vastly surprised to see their finished portraits. They marveled especially to see the colors and patterns of their *guipiles* reproduced. One Indian woman asked if I were going to take my picture away—a long way away—as far as Guatemala City; and when we told her, "Yes, across the sea to the United States," she shook her head and said, "I do not know any place farther than Guatemala City."

After the day's painting we would take long walks through the *finca*. The warm air was a-hum with the shrill chirping of the *chicharras*, or cicadas, whose din was so intense in the *cafetales* we had almost to shout to make ourselves heard. All through February, Guatemala rings with the incessant song of the *chicharras*.

While at El Zapote we saw our first *mancha* of *chapulines*, or locusts. All day the unnumbered host flew over the *finca*, darkening the sun, filling the air with an acrid odor and making it vibrate with the hissing of their myriad wings, while their droppings rattled on the tiles like hail. The speed of their flight could be judged by their racing shadow, but still they passed overhead, hour after hour.

Wherever they lit on trees, the branches creaked and snapped under the sheer weight of numbers. Their voracious jaws went immediately to work on the foliage, and cut leaves fluttered to the ground in a green mist; in a short time the tree would be



stripped bare. The birds and animals gorged themselves until they were sick from the peppery diet, but the destruction of a few thousands made no difference. The remaining host was countless and each insect would lay from eighty to ninety eggs.

Most of the *chapulines* settled for the night in the *potreros*, or pastures, and so did less harm than if they had chosen the *cafetales*, where they would have wreaked havoc among the *chalums*, although they do not attack the coffee. The next morning, after the sun had dried the dew on their wings, and they began to rise in great clouds again, the Indians went about beating tin pans, so that by their horrid clamor, the marauders would be kept in flight.

Every morning we were awakened by the firing of rockets in honor of the Virgin. An Indian child would rather have a rocket than a bag of candy. From childhood to the grave, the Indians keep themselves poor buying rockets.

One of our models was an aged *cargador* who posed with the *cacaxte* in which he had brought the costumes for the fiesta down from Totonicapán, in which highland village the costuming of fiestas has been a family monopoly for generations. The rental charges are exorbitant, often equaling the actual value of the costume, and the *finca* in good times has often spent as much as two thousand dollars for fancy dress. But though the appropriation was sharply slashed this year, the Indians had cheerfully raised a large sum among themselves and appeared to take a greater interest than usual in the forthcoming celebration.

Two extremely pretty Itzapa Indian girls, who were to take part in the fiesta, posed for us, the elder, like a little mother, arranging the beautiful headdress of their village in the hair of her sister, who in turn was mothering an armless and featureless wooden doll, dressing, kissing, and holding it to her flat baby breasts. Their costumes were of the finest quality, befitting the daughters of the richest Indian on the *finca*, who was regarded by all the *mozos* as a cacique.

In her childish babbling, the younger child came out with: "I like to go to the church where there are saints and we burn candles, but I'm afraid when we go up on the hill where there are no saints and they do strange things."

Carmen laughed. "She let the cat out of the bag, that time!

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Since the law was passed forbidding their activities, there aren't supposed to be any more *brujos*."

But Indian beliefs cannot be changed by law. Carmen told us of a strong healthy Indian woman on the *finca* who began to fail rapidly. Convinced in her own mind that she was about to die, she went to Pete and told him that her husband had bewitched her. In proof she produced a bottle she had found under her bed containing putrefied parts of frogs, lizards, chickens, and—a lock of her own hair. Pete decided to practice a little counter-brujeria. He told her to bury the bottle in the cemetery at midnight, at the same time repeating a line of mumbo-jumbo which he made up on the spur of the moment, and then to go home and to sleep, knowing no further harm could come to her. She did as he told her and soon recovered.

A dress rehearsal for the fiesta took place the evening before our departure. The Indians in their outlandish costumes, like so many mock seventeenth-century Spanish cavaliers and grandes, serpentined past the *casa grande*, dancing with a slow hop and two-step to the sound of drums and *chirimias*. We saw our pretty little model among the dancers, looking a real princess among buffoons. The procession ended at the church where the orators recited the lines they had been for months committing to memory and the dancers practiced their monotonous steps hour after hour. It would all be re-enacted the next day and the next, with the addition of marimbas, a continuous explosion of giant crackers and rockets, and an unending flow of *aguardiente*. Not a servant nor a worker on the whole *finca* would be on duty or capable of service.

Early in the morning we took leave of the Pettersens, the kindest and most stimulating of hosts, with whom we had spent one of the most strenuous and certainly one of the most interesting weeks of our lives.

We were met at the Patulul station by a side-burned Indian chauffeur who handed us a note from Maria Hodgson recommending us to have entire confidence in his driving. We understood this attention better when, as we neared Finca Pacayal, where we were to spend our third week, the road became a succession of hairpin turns and 30-percent grades with all too clear

a view of barranca depths below. It is a very bad road for weak livers. Hence the note to arriving guests.

The Hodgsdon's house is set in a charming garden, so aloof from *beneficio* and *rancheria* that one would never guess from his immediate surroundings that he was on one of the largest and princeliest *fincas* in Central America. It is a one-story frame house, spacious, comfortable, and well arranged, and the rooms are furnished with many exquisite colonial antiques brought up on the backs of *mozos* in the days before automobiles. As the house stands on the narrow back of a four-thousand-foot ridge in the middle of a great volcano-guarded valley, the visitor to Pacayal may enjoy the unique pleasure of watching the sun rise between Fuego, Agua, and Acatanenango and set between the twin peaks of Atitlán and Tolimán.

Pacayal and its extensive annexes are the property of Daniel B. Hodgsdon, an American, who has been a leader in Guatemalan business life for over half a century. We had met his charming wife Maria, their daughter, Mrs. Preston Peters of New York, and daughter-in-law, Mrs. Willard Hodgsdon, in the capital, and now we met the two sons, Willard and Donald, and the Willard Hodgsdon's small daughter Sunshine, who deserves the sweeping superlative of the prettiest child in the world.

Mariano, the crotchety old Indian *mayordomo* who has been with the Hodgsdons for thirty years, brought *frescoes* to the open *sala*, where we met the canine contingent: three pekingese and two police dogs, one of which later bit Sunshine in the face and was promptly shot. There was also a baby fox which Elsie held at the wrong moment, making a change of dress imperative.

Almost at once Willard broached the subject of Cotzal. In a few days he was going there with the *administrador* of Pacayal, Don Christiano Grottewald, to inspect a new *finsa* in the neighborhood. Would I like to go along? I could scarcely credit my luck, Cotzal being the one place I wanted to go before leaving Guatemala. My desire to go there had been born months before when I first saw the Cotzal costume in the collection of Tocsika Roach; it had grown with our trip to Sacapulas with Padre Rossbach, when we had seen the tantalizing trail zigzagging up the vertical plane of the Cuchumatanes; and had crystallized into an ambition upon seeing the beautiful Cotzaltecas in the night plaza

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at Finca Mocá. Now the trip was suddenly made possible and with the best guides and companions imaginable. It was like the answer to a prayer.

Elsie anxiously reminded me that I had been on my feet only three weeks since my long illness. Too, I had contracted a sore throat and was running a temperature. If it had not been a case of "now or never," I might have hesitated. The trip would require stamina, a commodity I then felt somewhat shy of. It meant turning our backs for a week upon civilization with its comforts, safe diet, and medical aid. In short, it meant taking a long chance. But not to take it would have meant a lifetime of regret. So I did not hesitate. The next day when Willard, Helen, Sunshine, and her pretty little French-Indian nurse left by car for Guatemala City, we planned to meet three days later in Escuintla and to go to El Zapote, from where Willard and I would start out alone for Cotzal.



JAN ANTONIO AGUAS CALIENTES

XXX  
Three  
Ancient  
Capitals

WE SPENT THE night at El Zapote, starting off early the next morning in Willard's Ford sedan on the first leg of our pilgrimage to Cotzal. I had rashly said I could cook and had been at once taken up. Carmen lent me a frying pan and added a can of Crisco, while Helen wrote out her pet pancake recipe, ending with "Mix this and try and eat!"

Our road, which first led to Antigua, the ruined colonial capital, was far more interesting and beautiful than the road up from Escuintla. It is indeed one of the most memorable scenic highways of Guatemala, being full of astonishing contrasts. For a stretch of several miles it was carpeted with the blue blossoms of the jarcaranda trees whose lacy boughs formed a twilit tunnel; then it wound through the charming Indian village of Alotenango with its brilliantly costumed populace; and before long entered the "bad lands," a desolate waste of boulders and black lava, a band of death across a fruitful valley.

All the way we had on one hand the reposeful beauty of Agua and on the other the smoking terror of Fuego. The latter volcano's most recent eruption occurred in 1932, and the Pettersens, who were on their *finca* at the time, suffered the horror of sitting on the quaking knees of a mountain that had suddenly blown off its top and was spewing forth deadly flames, stones,

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ashes, and streams of burning lava. That their dreams are still troubled by nightmares is not remarkable.

A league and a half before reaching Antigua we passed through the hamlet of Ciudad Vieja, in the smiling valley of Almolonga. It was here that Guatemala's conqueror, Pedro de Alvarado, founded his second capital after the Spaniards had been driven from the first, Iximché, by a revolt of the Indians. This event took place in the year 1527, just one year after Alvarado's final triumph, and only thirty-five years after the discovery of America.

Although the infant capital, called like its predecessor Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, was soon on its feet and could boast a cathedral, a vice-regal palace, hospital, hermitages, schools, and many residences, life there was too dull for the warlike Adelantado, who must needs be off at frequent intervals to meet Cortez in Honduras; to muscle-in on Pizarro in Peru; to strengthen his position at court in Spain; to marry first one niece of the powerful Duke of Albuquerque and, upon his bride's death, her sister; and finally to organize a madcap expedition to the Spice Islands, which came to grief when he turned aside to quell an Indian uprising in Mexico and was mortally wounded by a horse which fell upon him from a height. It is said that the conscience of the cruel conquistador so troubled him upon his deathbed that when a friend asked him where he felt the most pain, he groaned, "In my soul."

When the news reached Doña Beatrice, Alvarado's widow, she ordered the palace painted and draped in black, caused herself to be chosen as his successor and signed her first official act "*La Sin Ventura*"—"The Hapless One." It was almost as though she signed her own death warrant. For two days later *La Sin Ventura* was killed in the catastrophic flood which destroyed Ciudad Vieja.

From Ciudad Vieja the road lay between coffee *fincas* shaded by tall, dust-whitened *gravilea* trees. We stopped in Antigua, the third capital, only long enough to buy some bread and gasoline and then drove on to Chimaltenango, where we saw the famous fountain whose waters flow to both the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans.

Our next stop was at Tecpán, near which are the ruins of

Iximché, the ancient capital of the Cakchiquels, who aided the Spaniards in the subjugation of the Quichés and received the conquerors in their city with such cordial hospitality that Alvarado wrote, "I could not have been better off in our parents' house."

In return Tonatio, The Sun, as the Indians worshipfully called Alvarado, cut the gold ornaments from the ears of the Cakchiquel chiefs and demanded that they bring him "jars filled with precious metals, and even their drinking cups and crowns."

"If you do not bring the precious metal in all your towns, choose then, for I will burn you alive and hang you," said the grateful Spanish captain.

Because Iximché was the "center of all the country," the Spaniards founded there their first "city." And with the aid of the friendly Cakchiquels they subdued within a short time the Zutujils, overcoming their stronghold on Lake Atitlán, and the Izcuintepeques, a warlike coastal tribe. But the continued harsh treatment of the Spaniards in less than a year drove their Cakchiquel allies to revolt, and the Caballeros de Guatemala wisely decided that the vale of Almolonga was a healthier site for their seat of government.

Thanks to the automobile and good roads, we had visited, in the space of a few hours, all three of the early Spanish capitals.

At Tecpán we were joined by Don Christiano, and bought the supplies for our trip.

A few miles beyond Tecpán we stopped at a big *finca* owned by Pacayal and kept solely for the purpose of colonizing labor. Willard borrowed from the *administrador* a saddle for me to use, and we continued on our way, climbing up and up, through wildly beautiful mountainous country, covered with dark forests of ghoulish cypresses, to a height of eleven thousand feet. Nothing could be more thrilling than the views from this road, so high above the lesser ranges that we could see through a screen of writhing cypresses the shining silver sheet of Lake Atitlán lying in its blue bowl far below.

About one-thirty in the afternoon we arrived at Chichicastenango with its pretty plaza looking prettier than ever with the bordering jacarandas in full bloom. At the Mayan Inn, where we stopped for lunch, both the German manager, Don Juan

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Rohrmann, and his handsome assistant, Don Mario Molina, expressed surprise at seeing me.

"We heard you were dead, but absolutely dead; not once, but twice!" said Don Mario.

After lunch we drove on to the *cabecera* of the department, Santa Cruz Quiché, where we stopped to pay our respects to the *jefe político*, whom we wished to give us a letter to the *intendente* of Cotzal asking him to help us in the matter of securing models, especially of the skirted sex. But he told us Guatemala was a free country and no letter would be necessary.

At Sacapulas we put up for the night at a nameless little inn. The single guest room, furnished with three hard wooden *ban-cos*, as many small night tables and straight chairs, and one dresser, was clean-looking and elevated above the dusty patio. A small *galeria* ran across the front. The only other room was a tiny dining room—the kitchen being separate—and next to the dining room was an open shed for horses which we pre-empted for the car, so that our animals had to be stabled under the trees at the other end of the patio.

We had hardly begun unloading our effects before a *mozo* and his son arrived from Santa Avelina leading a *macho* and a little red horse, which latter animal shied so violently at the car that, being no horseman, I hoped this skittish beast would not fall to my lot. I was, however, soon relieved of doubt; for a moment later a boy brought in a dopey looking mule with six inches of pink tongue drooping listlessly from a corner of her mouth, which Willard said was to be my mount.

We changed into rough clothes and went in to a supper of a few pieces of stringy chicken, some lardy mashed frijoles or black beans, *tortillas*, and essence coffee. A brilliant full moon in the meantime had turned the night into blue-veiled day. Tempted by the tropical nocturnal brightness and softness, we strolled out into the great plaza of the quiet Indian village, whose white church and houses, tall coco palms, and spreading *ceiba* stood out with uncanny detailed clarity and beauty. The supper fires of the itinerant traveling Indian merchants flickered along one edge of the plaza, casting fantastic ruddy lights and dilated shadows upon the columned *corredor* of the long low building and sending off whiffs of boiling *atole*, coffee, and acrid smoke.



We wandered down to the spring by the river where four months before I had painted the women bathers under the guard of a be-pistoled *comandante*. We heard a soft splashing and saw mahogany-colored figures moving in the shadow of the fern-feathered rocks, picked out here and there by the glint of moonshine on a rounded shoulder or thigh. On coming closer we saw that the bathers were all men and boys.

By the time we returned to the inn, the night chill was beginning to make itself felt, and we found our *mozo* and his boy huddled over a dancing fire under the shed. As the man was to carry all our heavy equipment over the mountains on his back, Willard was slightly peeved that he had brought his boy with him, as he feared the youngster's little legs would tire and cause a delay. On the naked floor of the *galeria* outside our room an Indian couple lay rolled up from tip to toe in a single blanket. We went to bed half-dressed and despite the hardness of the *bancos* were soon asleep, lulled by the soporific tropical air and the scent of orange blossoms, jasmine, and the stable.



## XXXI

### Cotzal

A ROSE-AND-MAUVE dawn was breaking over the Cuchumatanes as we clattered out of Sacapulas the next morning, quickly leaving behind our *mozo* with his burdensome pack and small son trotting at his sandaled heels.

The trail began directly across the Rio Negro and zigzagged straight up to the pass against the sky.

The sun grew hotter and hotter as we wound hour after hour between giant rocks and stunted pines up the perpendicular mountain side, never losing sight of the dwindling white village below nor of our goal above. Now and then we met Indians with burdened backs moving with effortless rhythm up or down the trail.

When at last we topped the pine-guarded pass, we came to a forlorn hamlet called Chiúl. We saw some *cargadores* resting on the lee side of a small hill, and following their example, we paused to refresh ourselves with thermos-hot coffee and to take counsel; for at this point the trail split, one way going to Nebaj and the other direct, but over a formidable mountain, to Cotzal. Out of consideration for me, Willard had planned to go to Nebaj for the night; the trail was much easier and there was a highway between that town and Cotzal, although no wheel had ever turned upon it for lack of conveyances of any sort in the region.

My sore throat and fever had been burned out of me by the grueling morning's climb, and I felt game to push on to Cotzal, forgetting that our final destination was Finca Santa Avelina, twelve miles beyond. The only hitch was that the *mozo* with our luggage had been instructed to meet us in Nebaj. Just then, however, a red-jacketed Indian from Cotzal passed us going down to Sacapulas, and Willard asked him if he knew our *mozo*.

"*Como no*—yes," he said.

Willard then instructed him to inform our porter of our change of plan and gave him some *pisto* to buy a *puro*, or cigar, and to insure the retentiveness of his memory.

Before continuing, Willard lent me one of his wicked-roweled Spanish spurs and when my lagging mule felt it on her flank she stepped ahead with Willard's *macho* and Don Christiano's little red horse, which had seemed so spirited the night before but which had been quickly reduced by the climb to lamblike docility.

We dropped down into a stony, pine-forested valley, patched by cleared milpas, with here and there a grass-thatched Indian rancho. In the thin, pellucid highland air our vision gained a telescopic keenness and almost it seemed we could count the leaves of the oaks on the distant mountain sides. As the day advanced we met more and more Indians, not back-burdened *buboneros*, but whole families and groups dressed in their theatrically gay costumes—Indians from Santa Maria Chiquimula and from Cunen, a village on the Rio Negro below Sacapulas. We learned that they were going to a fiesta in Chajul, which lies beyond Cotzal.

"What fiesta?" we asked.

"*Tercera viernes*—Third Friday," they replied.

"Third Friday after what?" we asked several times, but never succeeded in learning.

Although I had now been in Guatemala nearly a year, the Indian life had lost none of its pristine fascination for me. For it is perennially full of the element of the unexpected, the new, and the picturesque. I had in my sketches and paintings recorded the costumes of over forty different villages, and here was yet a new one—Cunen—entirely distinct from all the others, and barbarically beautiful. The *guipil* is woven of fine white cotton

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with a circular neck and serrated hem, richly embroidered in red wool. It is tucked into the *corte* in front and left to hang free behind, a style peculiar to Cunen. When one considers that all *guipiles* are basically a simple rectangle of cloth doubled and sewed up the sides with an allowance for sleeves and a hole for the head, the infinite variety of design and style achieved by the Indians is astounding.

Now we plodded upward into the pine-scented hills. Near noon we came to two thatched Indian rest stations where we dismounted to refresh ourselves with some chocolate. In a little sheltered hollow near by I surprised an amorously happy young Indian couple seated beside the little fire they had built to warm their *atole*. But on seeing me they became sullen, resentful of having been caught in a moment of unguarded emotion.

We pushed on again in the almost intolerable heat. The trail became steep, stony, and tortuous, and we scraped between big boulders.

We came now to a small plateau called La Cuesta de los Embudos, the Hill of the Funnels, from the strange funnel-shaped holes on either side of the trail. These were from fifteen to twenty feet in diameter at the rim and perhaps thirty or forty feet in depth, their origin being a mystery.

From this point the worst of the ascent began. It shot straight up without a twist or turn. We dismounted and dragged our animals up after us. By a stretch of the imagination, we called it stretching our legs.

When, winded by the effort and the altitude of some eleven thousand feet, we reached the summit, we saw a huge heap of stones surmounted by a cross, all about which were strewn the floral offerings of the pilgrims. It is a quaint custom of the Indian travelers, upon completing the toilsome ascent, to kneel before the cross and drive a stake between the first and second toes to drive away fatigue!

Just below the gusty summit we paused, struck by our first vista of the illimitable valley in which lay the gleaming white villages of Cotzal and Chajul. I recalled reading in Stephens that it was some Indians of Chajul who informed the eccentric padre of Tecpán of the existence in the mountains beyond of a white city still inhabited by the original Mayas.

After a brief rest and refreshment, we began the perilous descent on foot, Don Christiano and Willard driving the animals from behind, while I went ahead to prevent their running away. In this way we arrived at length at a spring called Ojo de Agua, beside which were several *ranchitos*, or open thatched shelters, where scores of pilgrims from Cunen were resting. We watered



our animals and then rode on, coming before long to a turning of the trail from where we could look up and see Cotzal nailed to the mountain slope above us.

The houses of the town are white and clean, each one answering the problem of an odd corner—the shelf of a barranca or a ledge of virgin rock—no two occupying the same level or facing in the same direction, except around the plaza with its low,

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many-columned buildings and tall white church. Above and below the plaza, the town melts into the rocky wilderness.

As we rode through Cotzal, we saw in the *corredors* of the houses, the gorgeously appareled women sitting at their looms and winding frames, and in the streets the men in dashing red jackets, twisting long strands of maguey fiber into rope.

Willard and I called upon the *intendente*, a little wizened gray-haired ladino, who said he would be delighted to help us to secure models. And would *el Señor* Hodgson contribute to the building of a new road?

It was another two hours' ride to Santa Avelina—two hours that seemed interminable, and were more fatiguing and unstringing than the ten hours we had spent crossing the mountains, despite the lessening heat.

The joy of coming at last in the heart of the wilderness, to the unbelievable little *finca* house, with its small white man's comforts! Willard made *frescoes* of sour Sevilla oranges and icy spring water, and while we were still sipping them, our *mozo* and his son from Sacapulas came trotting up to the house, smiling and unwearied. I stared at them unbelievably, while the man squatted on his heels, slipped the *mecapal* from his forehead and eased his heavy pack to earth. The long day's ride had all but prostrated us with fatigue, but our porter and his boy had with ease come as far and on foot. I began to have a glimmering of why the Indians show contempt for all forms of motive power inferior to their own legs.

Don Alberto, the *administrador*, was a small, bespectacled brown man with a genial wrinkled face, who had an Indian wife named Dolores and I was never quite sure how many children. As night had closed in with tropical swiftiness, I went into the small windowless kitchen, where Dolores was kneading masa on a much-worn *metate*, and exercised my office of chef. The only light was a tiny kerosene lamp which the draught blew out every few minutes, placed on the primitive *poyo*, or adobe stove. In the semi-darkness I was constantly treading on the chickens and *chuchos*, or Indian dogs, which were as thick as fleas on the dirt floor. But I finally emerged with smoke-streaming eyes, scrambled eggs, and toast.

The night wind that swept the valley was edged with knives,

and it cut through my thin blanket so that I scarcely slept in spite of my weariness. We were up at dawn, a tropical dawn that struck with instant warmth and tipped the mountains with rosy light against the pale blue horizon; and when I went into the kitchen to make breakfast I found Dolores at her *metate* as if she had never left it. I think it is J. Eric Thompson who estimates that an Indian woman spends six hours a day making *tortillas*.

I was astonished when I went out to look at our surroundings to see no evidence of cultivation. The house stood in a clearing upon the crest of a huge hill, islanded by two roaring rivers, and the untamed mountains raised their hefty pine-clad shoulders against the sky in whatsoever direction I turned.

Below the house was a small *panela*, or sugar-cane mill, the machinery of which had been brought up from the coast piecemeal upon the backs of forty Indian porters in two trips. One piece alone weighed five hundred pounds! The water wheel had been made by the *finca* carpenter, and local masons had built the chimney with blocks of *sarro*, a *cocina*-like substance chopped from the bed of one of the rivers. Into the face of the chimney the workmen had set the carved stone image of a Mayan god found in an ancient mound on the *finca*. Water for the mill race came by ditch from a spring, many miles away at the head of a great falls.

This morning we climbed up to the falls by a perilous trail that wound like a rotten string along the slope of an immense barranca, and when we reached a point from which the cataract was visible through a frame of greenery, we stopped and stared in wonder and delight. High above us a great volume of water shot out over prodigious rocky bulwarks and fell thundering and echoing down and down into the shadowed cavernous depths until it was lost in a den of shrubbery far below. The rocks over which it splashed and cascaded were smoothly streamlined with the shiny brown *sarro*, upon which grew dewy grasses and tiny flowers, forever waving and nodding in the gusty spray. Where the water collected in deep *sarro*-lined pools its transparency was like that of a blue-white diamond. The falls were a good three hundred feet in height, and so beautiful that to have seen them alone would have made the trip to Santa Avelina worth

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while. We stayed for a long while watching the lancing, hissing, boiling water, and then climbed the steepest and slipperiest of trails toward the top.

Willard went ahead, hacking a way through the encroaching undergrowth with his machete. Presently he turned aside, and following him, we found ourselves at the mouth of a big cave which we entered, though not without a thought that such a place might easily prove a death trap in case of an earthquake. The interior, which formed a natural chapel, was hung with stalactites, like great inverted candles, and seemed a likely place for pagan worship. I climbed a rock, beyond which all was inky darkness, and upon striking a match, saw with a shiver of horror, that my next step would have plunged me into a bottomless pit!

Another climb, and we were in a pretty valley, where the ground was marshy from innumerable springs. A little beyond we came to two mean ranchos built of cornstalks and grass thatch on the edge of a small stand of sugar cane, and we cut a stalk of cane and chewed the sweet juice from the pith. A half-naked old hag appeared and stared at us stupidly, unable to understand a word of Spanish.

Splashing onward through a succession of shady springs, we emerged on the sunny banks of the river above the falls. Here we saw a spring filled with delicious-looking watercress, which we picked and wrapped in banana leaves to take home. We kept on along the stream, as Willard wanted to look at a small coffee *finca* that was for sale. Several times we had to cross the rushing river over nothing more than a rough-hewn pine log, and Willard confessed that if he weren't afraid of appearing cowardly he would straddle the log and inch his way across.

The owner of the *finca*, a big middle-aged ladino in a gaudy pink shirt, red sash, and black puttees, was awaiting us at the gate. Willard knew that the man had a Romeo complex and needed funds because he had been two-timing his wife on borrowed capital.

His house was built of mud-plastered wattle and roofed with tile. The golden parchment coffee was drying in wooden trays in the yard, and Willard, sifting the beans through his fingers, said it would be the best coffee in the world if properly handled. We went to look at the little hand dispenser, about which the air



was redolent of the honey-sweet odor of fresh crushed berries.

This business over, we started back, and on crossing one of the pine-log bridges we saw a very pretty Indian girl washing her *guipil* at the edge of the river. She wore her *corte* like a sarong to cover her breasts, exposing only her beautifully rounded shoulders and arms, along which ran a tremor of fear under our admiring gaze.

Immediately after lunch we set out for Cotzal. A *finca* Indian with a numerous family in Cotzal had agreed to help us find a suitable model, and we sent him on ahead with my painting kit. I had a saddle boil from the previous day's ride that made sitting in the saddle sheer agony, and Willard seeing me squirming uncomfortably, let me try his mount, a beautiful half-Arab colt, with a high spirit and shiny black coat, that he kept on the *finca*. But I found its gait even more trying on my afflicted parts and soon switched back to my own mule, whose derisive outsticking tongue under the circumstances appeared positively insulting.

Arrived at Cotzal, we clattered through the slanting, twisting streets, nearly every one of which was being used as a rope-walk by the red-jacketed men with their twirling wooden rope-twisters. Barefoot women trotted from place to place in their brilliant orange-red skirts, purple *guipiles*, and amazing headdresses. I thought what a rainbow the market would make, but we were told there was none, owing to the isolation of the village.

Our *mozo*, whose heels seemed to be equipped with the wings of Mercury, had arrived ahead of us, and was waiting in the plaza to take us to the house of his family, which stood on a shelf of rock twenty feet or so above the level of its neighbor. Several of the women were willing to pose, and the costume of each was so marvelous that it was tantalizing to have to make a choice. I finally selected the comeliest young woman and had her dress in her own *guipil* and the *corte*, sash, and headdress of three of the others, selecting each item for its age, and the softened harmonies which had resulted from years of wear, washing, and exposure to the sun.

While my model, whose name was Potenciana, sat on a low stool at her primitive winding frame amid all the litter of

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native watermelons, jars, and nets stuffed with dried corn or *carbon* that filled the *corredor* of her house, all the family gathered round to watch me paint her. I had completed her portrait but still had much work to do on the costume, when the light failed. It became necessary, therefore, to try to buy the dress, a proceeding that involved four separate transactions.

Potenciana sold her *guipil*—a museum piece—readily and reasonably. But the other women were more canny. They had quickly appraised the situation. The owner of the rainbow-tasseled striped sash, demanded almost as much as I had paid for the *guipil*, and I had to pay a most exorbitant price for the old *corte*, which I found out later was befouled into the bargain. As for the twelve-yard blue and red *cinta*, or head ribbon, nothing would induce its owner to part with it, but fortunately I could dispense with this particular item, having already matched its lovely faded colors.

Willard was delighted with my portrait of Potenciana and showed it to his *mozo*, who exclaimed "*Por Dios, es mi mujer!*"—"By God, it's my wife!"

We trotted down from Cotzal in the brief tropical twilight, Willard taking the lead on his high-spirited colt. Like most Guatemaltecos, he is an excellent horseman. Suddenly we saw him do a somersault over the horse's head, land on his feet still holding the reins, run a few paces by the animal's side, and then leap gracefully back into the saddle, as cleverly as a professional circus rider. Not until Don Christiano and I reached the scene of this feat and found a crupper lying on the ground, did we suspect that his horsemanship was not showmanship. We caught up with him at the river, where he had stopped to water his colt. He had not missed the broken crupper, which was the cause of his having been thrown, and far from being unnerved by his accident, he said that it had been a highly zestful experience and that he wished he knew how to repeat it.

Soon darkness, like an inky pall, fell upon the valley, and I could scarcely see the flapping ears of my mule, much less the hindquarters of the animal in front of me. We gave our mounts a free rein, trusting to some sixth sense which they possess to find the trail up and down stony gullies and along the brow of precipitous barrancas through the coal-colored nothingness. Not

until we were nearly home did the rising moon begin to silver the sky, but by this time the value of its light to us was purely esthetic.

The mystery of the existence of coffee on Santa Avelina was solved next morning when, after an arduous climb halfway to Chajul, we came to a sheltered rich-soiled plateau where there was a newly planted *cafetal*.

On the way we had stopped to investigate the Mayan mound that had yielded the little stone deity the Indian workmen had set into the panela chimney. This mound or temple pyramid, was some thirty feet high and so buried in the jungle and overgrown with tropical shrubbery that it could scarcely be distinguished from a natural formation. Yet when we scrambled up to the top we were able to see the ancient paving stones and several of the masonry steps, mute evidence that once upon a time these forest walls echoed to the sounds of human living. There are of course many such mounds in Guatemala, but their number does not lessen their fascination, for no one may say until they are opened and the surroundings thoroughly excavated, what archeological treasures they secrete, as the recent discoveries at the very door of the capital prove.

When we arrived at our objective, we beheld the strangest natural phenomenon—a cataract bursting from a giant wall of solid rock. These falls, which are of great volume, height, and beauty, spring from an underground river that is said to originate from the same source as the Chajul or Lacandon River, which waters the territory of the Lacandon Indians, a primitive, unconquered race inhabiting the jungles of Chiapas and Petén. And what is still more odd, these opposite-flowing rivers with the same source finally meet again in the Usumacinta!

After the grueling climb back, the ardors of which were mitigated by taking our turns at riding a horse which Don Alberto brought halfway to meet us, we went for a swim in the river whose incredibly clear waters cascaded from one *sarro*-lined pool to another. So inviting was the water that I forgetfully drank some, astonishing Willard by my folly; for I ran the risk of imbibing not only typhus germs, but the harmful mineral or animal life that formed the cement-like *sarro*.

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Willard said that the former *administrador* had nearly died from inaction of the kidneys as a result of drinking this pure-seeming water.

We had planned to start home early the next morning, but Willard romantically proposed that we go by moonlight. So we sent the *mozo* off that forenoon, as the Indians have an age-old dread of the night. His bulky load included our luggage and purchases of textiles and pottery—everything but my water-color pad with the portrait of Potenciana, which Willard would not entrust to the porter.

Toward evening a pelting rain fell, and it was still falling when we finished dinner and lay down in our clothes to sleep until ten o'clock, at which hour the moon was due to rise. But though we had instructed Don Alberto to call us, we all lay awake listening anxiously to the rain.

At last the moon rose wanly through a misting veil, making the bitterly cold night only a little less drear, but we still had faith that romance would be served.

Willard wrapped Potenciana in my slicker and insisted on being the first to carry her. He lent me his own oilskin poncho and borrowed one for himself from Don Alberto; but ignoring the sleety drizzle, we rolled our ponchos and tied them behind our saddles. I was so cold that I folded an army blanket across my shoulders and chest, and the others, after kidding me, followed suit. When Don Christiano and Willard had put on their side arms, we mounted our disgusted beasts, bade *Adios* to Don Alberto, dug in our spurs, and galloped off. The little Mayan god in the panela chimney grinned mockingly after us as we left this vale of *sarro* and strange waters.

Up and down, up and down, now under dripping clouds, now under dripping trees. From behind the scudding cloud banks, the malicious moon leered fitfully down at us as we plodded along the soapy trail with the knife-edged wind stabbing our backs. The drizzle turned to rain and at length, wet through, we made a concession to reality and put on our ponchos.

Once we passed a few Indian ranchos, whose flimsy cornstalk walls were pointed with ruddy light from the dying fires on the floors. Dogs yapped. A door opened. Light shot across our path and exploded in darkness. Indians, warmly blanketed and

stretched on dry *petates* with feet ringing the-glowing embers, wondered, no doubt, what travelers were doing on such a night.

Up over a ridge, down into a valley, along dark, gurgling waters; hooves squelching in the squashy mud, oilskins squeaking, saddles scrunching, spurs clinking, sporadic calls to one another. Midnight and Cotzal.

The town slept. Not a light. Not a soul stirring. The hooves of our mounts rang eerily upon the cobbles as we passed through the houseless streets, a roof on one side, a bank on the other. Even in the veiled starlight the town was a study in low-keyed reds, whites, and greens. We pulled in under the *corredor* of a building on the plaza across from the balconied *intendencia* and cat-a-corner from the ghostly hulk of the church. Dismounting, we emptied a pint thermos of coffee, smoked a cigarette, and, fortified for the climb ahead of us, pushed on. I relieved Willard of Potenciana.

No view is so sad as a retreating one, and I was glad that the pretty town, set in sweet-scented orange trees, mangoes, and *granadillas*, disappeared in the darkness behind us without the sense of being dragged away in time.

Down, down, through a topsy-turvy world, a moving center of vagueness without beginning or end. Up, up, over a trail of soapy clay, our mounts slipping and stumbling. We pitied them but drove them on with cruel spurs. Four legs were better than two. We could not relieve them because we could not have stood up on that slimy slanting path.

We came to the Ojo de Agua with its *ranchitos*, where we had seen gaily dressed crowds of pilgrims from Cunen, but now the place was dismal and deserted. The trail became worse and our progress slower. Slip and slide. Jerk and jolt. Tortoise-slow hours of toiling upward, ever upward.

Our animals' hooves struck stone, and we dismounted, trudging ahead on foot. The storm, instead of clearing, grew more violent. Rain drove down in hissing sheets, and the trail became a torrent. We splashed through rushing water above our ankles. Now and again lightning split the sky with blinding flashes and thunder shook the rocks. Blasts of wintry wind flailed us, while the rain came in volleys, like arrows.

Willard's voice: "Hell! I've lost my watch."

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Up, up the seemingly summitless mountain, through great sluices of rain, stumbling and struggling, pulling our steaming animals, into the bleak, breathless heights blotted out by the low-hanging starless sky.

Arrived at the pass, the gale force of the wind rocked us back on our heels. We remounted in the lee of the pilgrim cross and began the giddy descent. Down, down, jar and jolt, twist and scrape between giant boulders, writhing and shivering in rain-sopped blankets, knees soaked and aching, sloppy boots in stirrups, sore spines to saddles, frozen fingers on bridles. Down, down, to the Hill of the Funnels, where the water lay in thin shining sheets like ice. Down, down, to the thatched Indian shelters, where we warmed our bodies with a second thermos of coffee, and our spirits with a cigarette.

The rain slackened. At last a gray light quivered in the east; a silent, sunless dawn, uncheered by bird song; a twilight half-world, neither night nor day.

Down through dark forests of mighty trees; up through hills patched with milpas and dotted with thatched ranchos above which curled the smoke of domestic fires, whose cheery flames flickered through flimsy walls. Up and down, up and down. Dragging hours over forested ridges and through cultivated valleys. Then the steady, dogged climb up to Chiúl. The rain had ceased, but a heavy fog blanketed the world and no sun came through to thaw us.

On arriving at Chiúl, we stopped at an Indian rancho and asked leave to enter and warm ourselves at the fire that crackled invitingly between the three big stones in the middle of the floor. It was readily granted, and we passed into the soot-hung smoky interior.

Our host was rich in land and livestock, and his rancho was partitioned through the center by a wall of sticks, making a separate room for the family of his son-in-law. And thus the two families lived, in an intimacy without secrets. In a dark corner was a small rude bed made of wattled sticks and matted with rags, among which two coppery babies squirmed like rats in their nest. They would grow up in this one room with their elders, and by the time their eyes and ears were well opened, life would hold no mysteries for their young minds.

We learned that our *mozo* had spent the night here and had left but an hour or so before our arrival.

Thanking the Indians for their hospitality, we swung into our saddles once more and began the long descent to Sacapulas, Don Christiano taking his turn at carrying Potenciana. A milky mist filled the whole valley of the Rio Negro, and we could see nothing below us except the spectral shapes of trees and boulders that loomed through the vapors directly ahead. Zigzag, zigzag. Down through the clouds, hour after hour. Now and again an itinerant ghost, bent under a *cacaxte*, would materialize from the mists, pass us with a "'Dios, señor" and dematerialize. At other times, we would come upon a train of pack animals loaded with coffee and driven by several *arrieros*. For a moment they would be real, then they would fade into mere voices and sounds in the opaque offing.

We reached the valley about nine in the morning, and as we trotted up to the inn in Sacapulas, the sun came blazing through the melting fog. We found our *mozo* waiting, patient and smiling, in the patio. We unsaddled our mounts, which rolled joyfully in the dust, and then went to the room. The *banco* on which I had slept had recently been vacated, and a heavy service automatic had been left carelessly upon the bed table.

Willard sent the servant girl for a pint of *aguardiente*.

"Not for us," said Don Christiano and I.

But he explained that it was to be used not as a drink, but as a rubdown! It was an inspiration.

XXXII  
Antigua

WE HAD PUT off to the last our visit to Antigua, for the very human reason that it was so easy to go there, and we are glad that we did so. Antigua makes a grand climax to one's travels in Guatemala. Of course, I had been there briefly before Elsie joined me; that only made me more eager to show it to her.

In this magic old city of Spanish colonial times everything recalls the past: the conquering Spaniards, who built for eternity and stamped each work with their solid, grave, religious character; the padres, who lived in splendor off the fat of the land, and the unchanging Indians, before whom Alvarado appeared like the startling realization of a prophetic myth.

At every corner you meet the tragic presence of decaying beauty. But what was originally fine ages gracefully, and the roofless dwellings and crumbling churches preserve their charm, whether they stand empty or harbor an Indian family or a great market. All is decaying and fading, but defiant in its beauty.

We lodged with the Logans with whom I had stayed before, in the half-ruined Casa de Rodil, in the shadow of the Palace of the Captains-General, in a room with a twenty-foot beamed ceiling, five-foot walls, great carved cedar doors and no windows. Ramona, the Indian cook, prepared our meals on the old, old *pozo* in the dark-domed kitchen, and pattered back and



forth on bare feet through the fern-hung *corredors*. At night the rooms, with their time-blackened paintings of saints and their carved furniture, were lit only by flickering candles, as of old.

In a few days we succumbed to this atmosphere of antiquity with its eerie feeling of history crumbling silently to dust about



us, and the present seemed like a dream, a dim reflection of the living past.

We were at once captivated by the church of Belén because of its altar-like blue and white façade with the niche of the

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Nativity, in which the figures of Mary and Joseph kneel over the manger of the Christ child, while the silliest looking ass and a score of bas-relief cherubs gaze in rapture. Various other niches are occupied by somber-habited saints, while in the azure spaces between, flutter gingerbread seraphs. Surmounting this gaily frosted façade, sit two stern angels, like winged Roman judges, their dignity mocked by the irreverent *sopilotes* which alight upon their wreathed brows to dry their spread wings in the morning sun.

This church, with the adjoining home for invalid women and the ruined hospital, was built by a young Spanish noble, who forsook a life of pleasure for one of service to humanity after coming under the spell of the simple Franciscan friar, Pedro de Betancourt. Directly across the street is the lowly pink-walled house where Hermano Pedro lived. It is now the *El Santuario* soap factory, not inappropriately, since godliness and cleanliness are so closely allied.

Few men with so brief a career have been so long remembered. Hermano Pedro died on the 25th of April, 1667, after fifteen years' devotion to the sick and needy. Today, after the lapse of more than two and a half centuries, those in need of help come to pray at his tomb.

One likes to think of the humble Servant of God, as he was called, jingling his little bell up and down the night-stilled streets of Antigua, according to his custom, that the sound might echo in the hearts of people alone with their conscience. At least one murderer of those days of intrigue cringed and came to confession.

As I painted I thought how little the scene has changed since Hermano Pedro carried the sick upon his back to his hospital. Oxcarts creaked and rumbled over the cobbles; Indian women passed on bare feet with babies on their backs and bundles upon their heads; servants spread their multicolored wash to dry upon the grass of the plaza; and chickens bathed in the dust of the roadside. Only the pestiferous coffee flies and the stench of soap-making were new.

To reach Belén we passed the impressive ruins of the church and convent of San Francisco, whose ornate façade with its eighteen stucco saints is said to have remained almost undamaged

until the earthquake of 1917. The single chapel, still in use holds the tomb of Hermano Pedro.

Occupying most of the same block as Hermano Pedro's house, is the Escuela de Cristo, with its beautiful convent patio. In the church we saw a beautiful oil painting, indubitably the work of an old master, before which we sat a long time, admiring its fine composition and the colors, which still retain their freshness and luminosity. It is the only great painting we saw in Guatemala, which once was so rich in the works of Spanish and Italian masters.

Since you may walk six blocks in any direction from the Plaza de Armas and reach the outskirts of Antigua, the sixty-thousand population claimed for the ancient capital seems boastful. But then, you have to consider that the population was concentrated in numerous monasteries capable of housing many hundreds of people. There are many vast piles, like that of San Francisco, in which you wander as in a maze.

The monastery of Santo Domingo, which was the most splendid of all, was totally destroyed in the earthquake of Santa Marta, in 1773. Facing the Street of the Nobility, its grounds were so extensive that one garden alone had a fishpond a quarter of a mile long. As a sample of its riches, a single silver lamp before the high altar required the combined strength of three men to raise and lower it, while the main chapel sheltered a life-size silver statue of the Virgin, before which a dozen silver lamps were kept burning.

It was there that Bartolomé de las Casas, one of the most remarkable men of his time, composed, with the aid of three assistants, the Bible songs in the Quiché tongue, which proved more potent than Spanish arms in conquering the northern tribes of Guatemala. These Indians had so successfully resisted invasion that their territory became known as the Land of War. Las Casas, militant exponent of bloodless conquest, was given the chance to test his theories where steel and gunpowder had failed. He accepted the challenge on condition that the Indians should never be enslaved and that no Spaniard would enter their territory for five years. He and his brethren then taught their songs to four Indian merchants, and taking trinkets as presents, accompanied them to the warlike tribes. Success crowned the

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mission, and the peacefully subdued Land of War became known from that time forward as La Vera Paz, of True Peace.

Fray Thomas Gage, the first non-Spaniard to come to America, also lived in the Dominican cloister during the first half of the seventeenth century, and it is thanks to his description of it in *A New Survey of the West Indies* that we have a record of its past glory.

Gage, who was a great gossip, tells us:

"The other cloisters of the city are also rich; but next to the Dominicans is the cloister of the nuns called the Concepción, in which at my time there were judged to live a thousand women. . . . In this cloister lived that Donna Juana de Maldonado, Judge Maldonado de Paz, his daughter, whom the Bishop so much conversed withal. She was very fair and beautiful, and not much above twenty years of age, and yet his love blinding him, he strove what he could in my time against all the ancient nuns and sisters, to make her superior and abbess, and caused such a mutiny and strife in that cloister, which was very scandalous to the whole city, and made many rich merchants and gentlemen run to the cloister with swords drawn, threatening to break in amongst the nuns and defend their daughters against the powerful faction which the Bishop had wrought for Donna Juana de Maldonado. . . .

"Her father thought nothing too good, nor too much for her; . . . he daily conferred upon her riches, as might best beseem a nun, as rich and costly cabinets faced with gold and silver, pictures and idols for her chamber with crowns and jewels to adorn them; which with other presents from the Bishop (who dying in my time left not wherewith to pay his debts, for what as the report went, he had spent himself and given all unto this nun) made this Donna Juana de Maldonado so rich and stately, that at her own charges she built for herself a new quarter within the cloister with rooms and galleries and a private garden walk, and kept at work and to wait on her half a dozen blackamoor maids; but above all she placed her delight in a private chapel or closet to pray in, being hung with rich hangings, and round about it costly laminas (as they are called) or pictures painted upon brass set in black ebony frames with corners of gold, some of silver, brought to her from Rome;

...in her closet she had her small organ and many sorts of musical instruments... and here especially she entertained with music her beloved, the Bishop. Her chapel or place of devotion was credibly reported about the city to be worth at least six thousand crowns, which was enough for a nun who had vowed chastity, poverty and obedience."

We visited La Concepción and saw the private garden and chapel of this holy-veiled Circe, but the splendor has long since departed.

Of greater present interest is the cloister of the Capuchinas. A family of Indian weavers now occupy this nunnery, and the spacious halls and patios are strewn with the litter of human living. The thump of the batten is heard in the darkened cloisters, and the laughter of laundresses rings about the *pila*, while babies, born in the cells of the nuns, play with the dogs and chickens in the dusty *corredors*.

An Indian boy guided us through many twisting passageways to the circular floor surrounded by tiny cells where the nuns would go into retreat, subsisting for the period on bread and water supplied from a subterranean kitchen by means of a small shaft. Another shaft, the boy explained, served as the *excusado*.

Leaving this curious scene, we climbed to the choir loft of the ancient church, and crossing the crumbling floor at considerable risk, I found a shady corner from which to paint the roofless nave, spanned by a single remaining arch, but impressive still in its weed-grown grandeur. Squealing pigs and cackling hens rooted and scratched among the debris on the floor, while pigeons billed and cooed upon the capitals of pillars supporting broken arches vignetted against the turquoise sky.

The churches of the various religious orders were so magnificent that it would seem impossible for the Cathedral to have exceeded them, but it did. One hundred and fifty years in the building, and destroyed by two minutes of seismic violence, it still remains one of the most impressive monuments of the Spaniards, who came for adventure and built for the glory of Rome. We felt such awe amid the silent forest of mighty pillars that we returned again and again before I had the temerity to make a painting.

Begun in 1543 by Bishop Marroquin with funds raised from

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the sale of the half-ruined cathedral of Almolonga, it was divided into three great naves, having on either side eight chapels, two of which were large enough to pass for churches. The lofty altar dome rested on sixteen immense pillars sheathed in tortoise shell. Marble statues of the Virgin and the twelve apostles stood along the cornice, while quantities of gold and silver ornaments, bronze medallions, fine carvings and paintings gave to the interior a fabulous splendor.

We descended by match flares into a recently discovered crypt beneath the altar, which when first opened was found strewn with ghastly human skeletons, victims, for all anyone knows, of the temblor of 1773 who died horribly of starvation and suffocation. Our matches fitfully revealed a well-preserved bas-relief, and dark squares in the walls where long-sealed tombs had been broken open in a futile search for Alvarado's and Doña Beatrice's remains, which Doña Lenore, the lovely daughter of Alvarado and a Tlascalan princess, caused to be placed in two sepulchers in the cathedral. When our last match was spent, we hurried from that shuddery chamber with its odors of dankness and death.

Out in the streets, it being market day, we saw bright Indians trotting nimbly marketward with wondrous heaps of merchandise piled high over their heads—mountains of *ollas*, towers of raw white pine furniture, rolls of rush *petates*—products of the hot, temperate, and cold lands. It was like a pageant of the past, or a rush of color from a painted reservoir whose floodgates had suddenly been let open. Following a rainbow rivulet across the history-drugged Plaza de Armas, we came to where the streams from every quarter converged on the cloister of the Compañía de Jesús in a sea of churning reds, blues, yellows, and magentas. There was a confusion of dust-mingled market smells, earthy and recognizable; but the uncanny hush that hangs over Indian crowds made the gathering seem like a conclave of gay ghosts haunting the abandoned ruins.

The market is not held in front of the ancient cloister, but within its walls! We pushed through the entrance and found ourselves in the first of a series of large patios alive with venders of articles of every description: peanuts, fresh-killed meat in screened cases, shelled yellow corn, vegetables freshly washed in



A curious sight! A Christian church dedicated to Mammon!

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the *pila*, gaudy textiles, and not unsavory stews kept bubbling on charcoal braziers in the shady *corredors*. Passing through the patio we entered the little plaza before the imposing arch of the once-ornate portal, whose anatomy of adobe and brick is still partially covered with royal rags of fresco.

A double file of Indian women, all squatting on their heels before large baskets of corn, chili, and beans, whom we knew to be from the near-by village of San Antonio Aguas Calientes from the design of their purple *guipil*, made a pictured aisle through which we followed a woman with a rolled *petate* balanced on her head and a baby nodding at her back into the great roofless nave of the church. The scene within was like none other under the sun—a Christian church dedicated to Mammon!

Availing ourselves of the shade of a crumbling oratory, whose thick arch framed an amazing picture which could only be found in Guatemala, I began to sketch, surrounded by Indian women talking softly in their liquid idiom, while brown babies crawled over our feet and hobbled hens lay all about in the dust. An Indian mother, who had slung her baby in front of her in order to nurse it, held out a chicken for sale, passing it back and forth over the head of the suckling infant so that customers might inspect it. The chicken cackled protestingly, but the babe showed no signs of annoyance.

The whole sun-swept nave was a kaleidoscope of brilliant costumes from a score of villages. We saw a woman from Santa Maria de Jesús carrying a huge bundle on her back by means of a tumpline passed across her forehead, the only Indian woman we ever saw supporting her burden like a man.

The venders of different wares all had their allotted sections, as in a modern department store. The corn and bean sellers used small hand scales, and we saw one woman customer, who suspected the merchant of scale tipping, dump the contents of the scales back into the corn sack and move angrily away.

While there are public toilets, the lowest-class Indians, whose animal-like habits make them singularly free from embarrassment, had no hesitancy about using the cleared space by the altar in full view of the market, but no one paid the slightest attention. Mothers changed their babies where they sat, fastening the diapers with a strip of cloth or narrow belt. We saw one



mother place a silver chain over her child's belly band, probably to ward off sickness.

Superstitious fears caused some of the Indian women who saw me sketching them to duck behind *petates*. Many believe that terrible death-dealing magic can be worked with a likeness, while others think that artists have the power of seeing their naked bodies through their clothes.

In 1767 the Inquisition drove out the Jesuits, and a few years later earthquakes dashed down the vaulted ceiling and massive domes; and the cloisters from which had emanated light, learning, and Christian doctrine, became the shelter of petty traffickers whose minds still grope in the darkness of the Middle Ages.

We sometimes returned from the market with itchy toes; the cause—*niguas*. In case *niguas* are unknown to you, they are tiny burrowing fleas which infest the ground especially in the neighborhood of pigs, and they love human feet. The classic position where they dig in is around the toe nail. Once settled there, they immediately set up housekeeping, depositing a minute sac containing an appalling number of microscopic eggs. If the eggs are allowed to hatch, one's feet soon become thickly colonized with *niguas*.

Sebastiana, the Indian house girl, removed the egg sacs from our toes very expertly with a burnt needle and without breaking the delicate covering. No one can do this job so cleverly as the Indian women, who are experienced at it from childhood. The consequences of bungling are often dreadful, and may easily result in the loss of one's leg or one's life.

Antigua weaves a strange spell around those who reside for long amid its storied ruins. At first the unshaded and almost lifeless streets are exceedingly desolate-looking, and the low, flat-roofed houses with big, barnlike *zaguán* doors and tall iron-barred windows give an idea of a total absence of comfort.

But this style of building is, on reflection, exactly what one should expect from the Spaniards, who outwardly appear made of flint and inwardly are the most romantic race on earth. So with the houses. Their austere walls conceal charming patios which once were, and in many cases still are, filled with the color and scent of flowers and orange blossoms, the melody of

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caged song birds, the coo of doves, and the splash of waters in gay-tiled fountains. In olden days sonorous Spanish and sibilant Indian, the rustle of silk and the ring of cavalier steel, were heard in the cool many-columned *corredors*; and the magnificent halls were hung with fine tapestries and paintings; filled with richly carved furniture; and lit by hundreds of wax candles in glittering candelabra and chandeliers of silver and prismatic crystal. The Spanish house is primarily a series of enclosed gardens—a scheme of living perfectly suited to this climate of perpetual spring.

With Doña Elena, the pretty Antigueña wife of our host, we visited many wonderful old houses and heard many wonderful tales attached to them. Beneath the "courting seat" of the house on the very corner from the Casa de Rodil in which we were lodged was found, not long ago, a fortune in gold, precious jewels, wrought silver, and old Spanish coins; below the floor of that buff-tinted house around the corner was discovered, in the process of restoration, a secret subterranean chamber, sumptuously furnished, in the middle of which, seated in a tapestried arm-chair, was the corpse of a young woman holding a baby in her arms; while that white building a block and a half beyond the Cathedral, now a school whose master is said to have a hundred illegitimate children, was the home of Bernal Diaz del Castillo, one of Cortez's doughtiest captains, who here, in his last years, wrote his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, thereby winning greater laurels than by all his feats of arms.

Just across the street, on the corner, is a restored dwelling which looked familiar to us because its beautiful carved window grilles were copied from those of the Casa de Rodil. This is the ancient Casa del Fiscal de la Audiencia, now owned by Dr. Wilson Popenoe, head agronomist of the United Fruit Company. It is popularly known as the Popenoe House.

We were admitted by a pleasant-faced Indian housekeeper—Dr. Popenoe being absent at the time—and stepped across the threshold into the seventeenth century. For before her sudden death in 1933 from eating an overripe akee, Mrs. Popenoe devoted herself to recreating within these fine old walls a colonial residence of the grand period. Every piece of furniture is pedi-

greed, the only modern touch being the posthumous portrait of Mrs. Popenoe by Garavito.

In her delightful book on Antigua, *Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala*, Dorothy Popenoe says that the earliest record of the house, which is one of the few survivors of the grand residences flanking either side of the old Street of the Nobility, is of the year 1639, when it belonged to the King's Attorney.

We spent much time passing from room to room and felt before every object the spirit of loving care which had pieced together this mosaic of the past. We saw the three-hundred-year-old domed kitchen chimney which still draws off the heat and smoke from the old brick *pozo* and the two dutch ovens, the bathroom with its sunken tub trimmed with blue and gold tiles and cleverly supplied with hot and cold water from tanks set in the opposite side of the wall; and we ascended to the pigeon loft where the winged messengers were kept, and then squeezed through the little twisting stairway that leads onto the *azotea* with its view through the treetops of ruined roofs and arches and of the grim cones of the destroyers.

We visited another aristocratic old residence on the Street of the Nobility that was in much the same state in which the Popenoes found their house: the patios filled with debris and littered with the trash of Indian squatters. All that, however, could not cover up the remains of fine stonework nor cloud the idea of former luxury conveyed by the splendid succession of patios. This house had a large hall with a stage at one end, evidently once used for private theatricals.

On other days we visited other houses: the House of the Lions with its rampant stone lions on either side of the doorway, and the House of the Sirens, one of the few two-story dwellings, named for the seductive female figures that grace its portal. The former was in a frightful condition and occupied by poverty-ridden tenants, but the latter was being beautifully restored. Every house in Antigua has its checkered story and its curious features, but none more curious, certainly, than the *zaguán* we saw paved with bleached pig bones! The bones were set in cement in such an attractive design that to the casual glance the material used would pass unnoticed.

We never tired of wandering about Antigua. There was al-

ways a new church, a stone cross, an arch flung over a street, a wonderful fountain, or an unsuspected chapel embosomed in greenery to be seen or discovered, and a shady Alameda with stone benches to rest on. We found one church turned into a blacksmith's shop; another into a women's prison! And of course there were always the beautiful gardens of the Plaza de Armas where we could sit beneath the pepper trees and watch the Indians going home from market; admire the architectural beauty of the Palace of the Captains-General and the natural beauty of the cloud-wreathed green volcano of Agua which, in the thin transparent air, seems to rise directly behind it; and listen to the refreshing gurgle of the fountain, whose waters an inspired sculptor caused to flow from the breasts of four excessively feminine torsos.



## XXXIII

### Risqué Saints

WE HAD HEARD of some risqué images of saints to be seen in the *Museo de Santa Ana*, but when we found that no one in Antigua seemed to know of such a place, our curiosity grew until, toward the end of our stay, to find this elusive repository of irreverence became a kind of quest.

We had unsuccessfully visited the University of San Carlos, once the greatest center of learning in Central America, and now a colonial museum, and we were told that this was the only existing collection of antiquities.

Nevertheless, we continued to seek and inquire. But we seemed as far as ever from our frivolous goal, until we learned of a little church of Santa Ana somewhere in the environs. We decided to scour the suburbs.

In our rambles about town we had seen, in an old courtyard, an antiquated carriage with landau seats and surrey top. Beneath the dust was a gleam of fresh paint, suggesting that it might still be in circulation; and as it seemed to be just the vehicle for our purpose, we made inquiries and found that it could be hired for a mere twenty-five cents an hour.

So early next afternoon Doña Elena, Elsie, and I set out from the Casa de Rodil in our fanciful equipage, drawn by a team of sorrel ponies, the newly polished green and yellow wheels glit-

tering like wax as we bumped and clattered on iron-bound rims over the rough cobbles. Our driver was a character right out of Dickens, a sort of ladino Barkus, whose hair lay in curls upon his forehead and rusty coat collar. He had a florid mustache, whose ends curled over apoplectic cheeks, and he was dressed to the teeth with a large gray felt hat perched at a rakish angle, a blue suit, and, mark of superiority, shoes. He seemed to know, and to be known by everybody. But he had never heard of Santa Ana.

Elsie and Doña Elena occupied the rear seat facing the driver, while I sat opposite to them, looking backward, so that I saw the look of surprise and the broad smiles of the citizens as we passed like a comic apparition. At every street corner, Barkus would thrust out one hand and give two sharp dings on a little bell, like an ice-cream vender's. Now and again the hot smell of fresh manure drifted back from the horses, making us wonder how romance ever survived in the buggy-riding gay nineties. The click and bang of iron against stone awoke ghostly laughter among the ancient ruins between which we jogged.

We passed some ladino children who were dancing and singing *El Pedido*, on the sidewalk. As the two sides danced toward, and retreated from, each other, I was reminded of a similar game called "Here I Come," which I played in my own childhood. It would be curious to trace the origin of children's games and to discover how they make their way to the remotest corners of the globe.

Our passing temporarily broke up the game, for the children all stopped to stare at us and then broke into treble shouts and laughter.

We decided to go first to San Felipe, about a league north of Antigua, and to make a circuit of the suburbs until we came to Santa Ana. As we neared the outskirts of the city we passed the fair grounds and bull ring, and a little beyond Doña Elena told Barkus to stop before a house belonging to a potter, where in a corner of the patio, we saw a man grinding clay into a fine powder by means of a great circular stone which he pushed around and around on its upright axis with a long wooden handle. At a long workbench with three crude turning posts driven by foot wheels beneath, the potters were fashioning the

beautiful *tinajas* one sees balanced on the heads of the Indian women going to and from the streams, lakes, and *pilas* all over Guatemala.

Getting back in our gaudy chaise, we soon left the bumpy cobbles of Antigua and began rolling more peaceably over a narrow dirt road, bordered on either side by sprouting wattled fences and shaded by feathery trees. As we were at the beginning of the rainy season, the occasional showers had laid the dust and bathed the foliage till it glinted in the sunlight. All that might be dull in any other climate was made bright and gay by the purest light, the bluest sky, and the balmiest air that ever blew or beamed upon a wicked world.

Before long we came to San Felipe—a few mean huts and a magnificent church, whose Gothic architecture is startlingly incongruous in Indo-Spanish Guatemala.

This church is a famous shrine, second only to that of Esquipulas as a place of pilgrimage, as it too shelters a miraculous Christ. Some little Indian children ran up and gaped at us with saucer-like brown eyes as we got down from our four-wheeled gig and went into the church.

High up on the altar lay the Christ in a glass sarcophagus, and kneeling reverently below were an Indian family—father, mother, with pick-a-back baby, and a barefoot boy with turned up pantaloons. What struck us as strange was that the woman was doing the praying in that conversational litany peculiar to the Indians, for it was the first time we had ever seen a man let his woman address his deity for him.

Passing behind the altar, we found the walls covered with small primitive paintings graphically describing the illnesses, accidents, and horrors from which the donors gratefully believed themselves to have been cured or saved by their faith in *El Señor de San Felipe*.

We mounted a short stairway to the platform where lay the satin-robed figure of the Christ, so realistically modeled, painted, and postured, with real hair falling from the clear brow upon the satin pillow, that we started involuntarily. We could well understand its effect upon ignorant minds, and especially upon the minds of the poor Indians, who further believe that it was created from their sacred *maíz*.

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One hand rests pointedly palm upward upon a small pillow beside a little window in the sarcophagus. On either side of the platform are tables bearing small wax replicas of men, women, girls, babies, legs, arms, hearts, heads, chests, hands, etc.; and the people believe that by placing one of these objects, together with a monetary offering, in the hand of the Christ the affliction actually suffered in the part thus represented will be dispelled.

We saw a heart and a leg lying with a few pennies in the hand of the Christ, while upon the chest lay a girl's head, a heart, and a hand with some *pisto*, or small change. Doña Elena explained that this latter offering had been made by a lover who hoped that the Christ would intercede in his affair. The head represented his loved one; the heart, their love; while the hand, in this case, was the symbol of marriage. As might be expected, the more superstitious are not above invoking the supposedly miraculous power of the Christ against their enemies, by piercing the wax offerings with pins and needles. Four centuries of Christian doctrine have not taught the Indian to look higher than his images of wood and stone, whether saints or idols. He still believes that these products of his own hands possess occult powers that can be prejudiced by his selfish desires and offerings. And he always expects usurer's returns—a bumper crop or the bumping-off of his enemy in return for wax offerings and a penny or two.

On leaving the church we asked some Indians if they knew of the church of Santa Ana, but none had heard of it. So we began our blind circuit of the environs of Antigua, passing through shady lanes between coffee *fincas* until we came to the tiny church of San Bartolomé. The door was locked, but a sacristan let us in, and we saw before a statue of the patron saint an offering of plátanos, oranges, sugar cane, and fresh vegetables.

"These fruits will be stolen," said Doña Elena, "but the donor will believe that the saint, having eaten them, will assure him of a good price for his crops."

Again we climbed in behind Barkus and drove for upwards of an hour through *fincas* and cultivated fields, above which



rose Agua and Fuego, the Gog and Magog of the valley. Great clouds of mist rolled over the sides of the volcanoes and mingled with the smoke from the crater of Fuego. The Spaniards have a saying that the land is most fertile around volcanoes and this seemed to be borne out by the lushness of every growing thing.

At length we arrived at the hermitage of Calvario, at the head of the shady Alameda del Calvario, with its deserted stations of the cross and fine ruined fountain. In the *plazuela* we saw the massive stone cross which commemorates the founding of the church in 1618.

We spied some Indian women sitting on the grass under a spreading oak and asked them if they could direct us to the church of Santa Ana, but they only giggled at our outlandish equipage and shook their heads negatively.

On we jogged, up the side of Agua, until we came to the little village of San Juan del Obispo, clinging precariously to precipitous steeps. While Barkus rested the ponies in the shade of a big tree, we inspected the crumbling palace and church which was built by the first occupant of Guatemala's see, Bishop Marroquin. A sacristan keeps up the garden in the main patio and guards the church, which is still in use although long ago looted of its finest treasures.

Standing upon a bluff, the palace commands a splendid view of Antigua, dreaming in the lap of the volcanoes far below.

Driving on, we came to San Pedro with its remarkably large plaza bordered by old flowering trees, where we got down and stared in delight at the ruined church, of which there is little more than the beautiful façade. When we were ready to depart, Barkus gallantly presented Elsie and Doña Elena with bunches of fragrant white flowers which he had picked off the trees, and he told us that in talking with the townspeople he had at last learned how to get to Santa Ana!

As we rolled out of San Pedro, we passed an Indian family moving along in the road at a tireless jog trot, the mother with the inevitable baby jouncing up and down in the fold of her *reboso* as if its neck would break, the father carrying two larger children on top of an immense bundle of corn supported on his

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back. Sightings such as this never allowed our interest in Guatemala to flag. For it is a country in which every human being or passing object to be seen is a subject for a picture.

Our road took us down the mountain and through a labyrinth of back lanes, leafy and winding. Suddenly we found ourselves in a large green and saw before us the pretty pink church of Santa Ana. It was the most delightful little church we ever beheld. It might almost have been built by children, its lines were so free and the figures of the saints and the Holy Family in their several niches so naïvely modeled. And at the very top was a quaint image of God Himself!

In the middle of the green was an interesting old *pila*, whose water trickled from the mouth of a grotesque glazed-tile mask, somewhat battered, but with clear indications of sideburns and *bigote*, as if it had been intended for a caricature of a grandee.

We found the church locked, but several Indian boys were practicing soccer on the green, and we gave one of them five cents to fetch us the key. He darted off and came back in a flash with a key that was fourteen inches long and weighed fully a pound. But it did not unlock the secrets we sought. There were no risqué saints.

Our adventures were not yet over, however, for as we were about to re-enter Antigua over one of the bridges on the Rio Pensativo, that modest brook which has become the most celebrated stream in Central America, Doña Elena told Barkus to draw to the side of the road and to wait for us while we went to look at the ruins of the church of the Holy Cross in the heart of a coffee *finca*.

Of all the smaller churches in and around Antigua, this hidden one of the Holy Cross is surely the most romantic. Temblors have tumbled in the roof, and the iron tooth of time has gnawed the glorious façade, only to give it a greater beauty and a more glowing patina than the perfection of art could attain. Originally a minor masterpiece of Spanish baroque wonderfully realized by Indian hands, it is now a sort of triumphal arch to Beauty, and as I gazed upon it, I felt tears of delight stinging my eyes.

Only art attuned to life can make one feel deeply. Such art,

unlike the productions of frustrated artists when the world happens to be at sixes and sevens, is eternal.

In the seventeenth century, artists were at home in the world. Antigua was built without a discordant note and abandoned before a change in the state of men's minds set in. Thus it remains a perfect whole, and one of the world's most important civic ruins.

The scene of the Crucifixion in the topmost niche of the church of the Holy Cross is miraculously intact. The rest of the ornamentation is enlivened by earthy and mischievous touches. The attitude of the cherubs over the portal is that of the little boy who fouls a wall, while on the capitals of the columns on either side are Titian-haired caryatids with red lips and sensuous breasts. I suspect that when the monks of this order renounced the world, they had their fingers crossed!

Near by is the beautiful *pila*, mutilated by modern vandals who have knocked off the seductive details, while beyond are the sunken tile baths of the monks, now used as laundry tubs by the Indian women of the *finca*.

We were startled, on passing through the doorless portal into the ruined rotunda of the church, to see amidst the ancient debris a fresh tomb. Doña Elena told us that a Spanish girl of Antigua so loved these ruins that she came here often to sit and read or simply to dream and refresh her soul with their beauty. A few years ago she was taken fatally ill, and her last wish was to be laid to rest where she had passed the happiest and most peaceful moments of her life.

The day was drawing to a close, and the walls of the church that rose above the *gravilea* trees caught the last glow of the vanishing sun, making the whole scene appear fairylike, without real substance, as if it were a half-remembered sketch or a romantic dream.

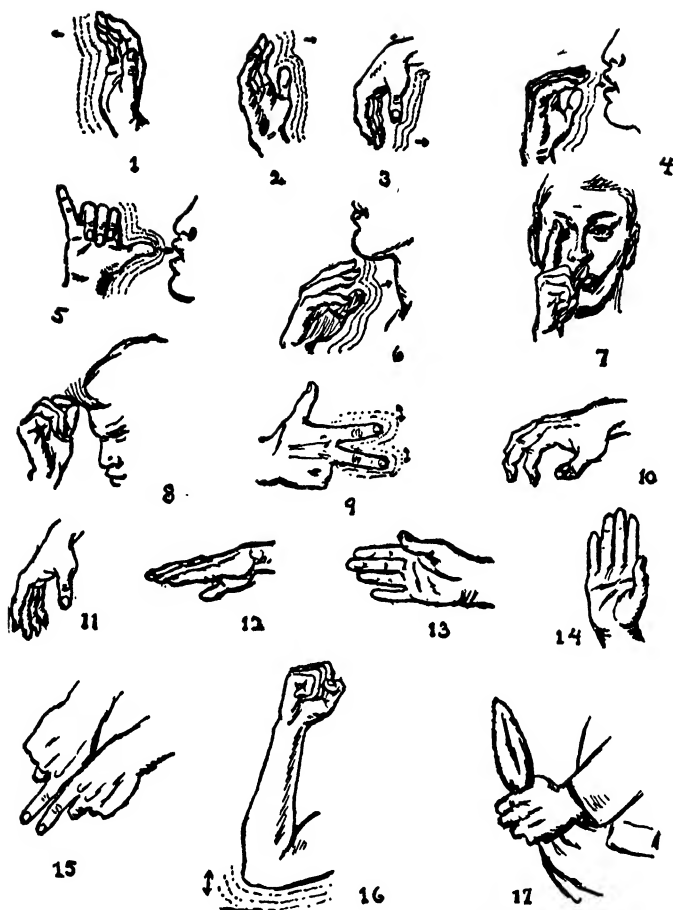
As we turned to leave, the tapping melody of a marimba reached our ears, and following the sound through the shadowy *cafetal*, we found two Indian ranchos in a small clearing. Before one of them sat a woman and her comely daughter, while inside the other, barely to be seen in the shadows, were two men and a boy practicing together on a small instrument. They played *El Son*, Guatemala's own Indian dance tune, and

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we tried to persuade the girl to dance it; but neither our gifts of cigarettes nor our own try at the steps, which made them all laugh, succeeded in breaking down her timidity. So we bade them *buenas noches* and went back to our patient driver. Then with a great clatter and two merry dings at every street corner, we drove through Antigua and drew up with a flourish before *El Gran Salon Unico*.

At *El Unico*, The Only, actually Antigua's only bar, we refreshed ourselves with cold beer and *boquitas*, or canapés. Then we walked back to the Casa de Rodil. The moon had risen, and the sky, almost dazzlingly blue even at night, was gemmed with stars. As we made our way through the silent streets between the splendid old buildings and ancient churches, whose decay was softened by the silvery light, we felt extremely reluctant to go indoors and shut ourselves away from the beauty of the Antiguan night.

During our final week in Guatemala City our friends seemed bent on making us miss them, and it was more like leaving than returning home when, from the deck of the S. S. *Plátano*, we watched the vanishing Guatemalan profile.



## SIGN LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

GUATEMALAN INDIANS have such a perfect sign language that it is possible for two of them to carry on a conversation a quarter of a mile apart without either opening his mouth. Even white Guatemaltecos can rarely express certain ideas without using the corresponding Indian sign for them. To give a few useful examples: 1. Hand waved away from one's self: Come here. 2 and 3. Hand waved towards one's self, held either up or down: Go away; good-by. 4. Eat. 5. Drink. 6. *Yo no soy tu gueguecho* (I'm not your goiter): You can't stuff *that* down my throat. 7. Yo, or Ojo!: I, or Take care! 8. *Echar una cana al aire* (to throw a white hair to the wind): To commit an indiscretion. 9. *Alfilar sus tijeras* (to sharpen your scissors): Gossip. 10. *Puños muy largos* (large claws): grasping; thieving. A similar sign means *tocando el piano* (playing the piano): light-fingered. 11. A chicken is so high. 12. A pig is so high. 13. A horse is so high. 14. A person is so high. (To indicate a person's height by sign No. 12 is very insulting, as it compares that person to a pig.) 15. *Juntos*: together. 16. Knocking elbow while keeping fist closed: Stingy. (Knocks without opening.) 17. Corner of coat or table cloth formed like mule's ear: Change subject, someone is eavesdropping.



## GLOSSARY

- abrazo—embrace  
achinero—peddler  
achiote—native flowering tree  
Adios—Hello-Good-by-God-bless-you  
administrador—administrator of coffee *finca*  
aguardiente—brandy distilled from sugar cane  
alas de cucuracha—(literally, cockroach wings) cornflakes  
alcalde—mayor  
alfilar tijeras—to gossip  
alforja—saddle bag  
alguazil—constable  
almendra—native almond tree  
amate—large native timber tree  
animalitos—little animal figures  
anonas—native fruit  
apodo—nickname  
arrieros—mule drivers  
arroba—measurement of weight equal to 25 lbs.  
asustado—literally, “frightened one”; name given to Indian  
whose hair stands on end  
atole—corn beverage  
a tuto—pick-a-back  
azotea—flat roof or platform on top of house
- bananal—banana plantation  
baño—bathroom  
barranca—ravine  
bastante—sufficient  
batea—wooden trough for masa  
beneficio—processing plant  
beso—kiss  
bigote—mustache  
boca costa—intermediate region between low and high tropics

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bocina—small bugle

brujo—witch doctor

buhonero—high-class peddler

cabecera—capital of a province

cacaxte—carrying frame

cacique—Indian noble

Cadeja—evil spirit

cafetal—coffee plantation

caite—native sandal

Cakchiquel—one of five main Guatemalan tribes

camote—sweet potato

canasto—basket

candil—Indian spirit lamp

canicula—Indian summer

cantil—venomous snake

capiruchu—Indian boys' game

coronel—man in charge of one section of *mozos* on a *finca*

carcel—jail

cargador—burden carrier

casita—shed for coffee

cayuga—dugout canoe

ceiba—sacred tree of the Indians

cenote—common black bird

cenizton—native songbird

cigarillo—cigarette

cinta—Indian head ribbon

coche—pig

cofrade—member of *cofradia*, or religious sodality

colono—Indian settler on a *finca*

comal—clay griddle for *tortillas*

como no—yes

corredor—corridor of a house

corte—cut of cloth worn as wrap-around skirt

costumbre—custom

cué—pyramidal base for house or shrine in Mayan city

chachal—necklace worn by Indians

chalum—shade tree for coffee bushes



Chapin—native of Guatemala (slang)  
 chapulin—locust  
 chicha—alcoholic drink distilled from fruits  
 chicharras—cicadas  
 chiche—tit  
 chichicaste—poisonous nettle  
 chilacayote—a fruit of the gourd family  
 chingona—untranslatable name of popular dice game  
 chirimia—native flute  
 chivo—sheep  
 Chivo—nickname for native of Quezaltenango  
 chompipe—turkey  
 chucho—dog

derrumbe—landslide  
 despedida—farewell  
 duende—hobgoblin

E-e-e-e-e-e!—exclamation  
 Está Sr. L?—Is Mr. L at home?  
 excusado—toilet

faja—Indian sash  
 finca—plantation  
 finquero—planter  
 frijoles—black beans  
 frijoles con queso—beans cooked in cheese  
 fumarola—hot spring or geyser

gallo en chicha—chicken cooked in brandy sauce  
 gegenes—gnats  
 goma—hangover  
 gozar—to enjoy  
 gravilea—shade tree for coffee bushes  
 granadilla—native fruit  
 guacal—gourd basin  
 guacamole—avocado salad  
 guapo—beautiful  
 guardabarranca—native songbird

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guarumo—ant tree

guicoy—native vegetable

guipil—tunic blouse worn by Indian woman

guisquil—native vegetable

gusto—pleasure

hacienda—cattle ranch

halyconia—red flower of wild *plátano*

¡Hasta ver Dios!—Bottoms up!

hormiga tree—used for marimba keys

huevos a caballo—(literally, eggs on horseback) poached eggs

huevos tibios or huevos pasado por agua—soft-boiled eggs

intendente—high administrative official

izote—yucca

jacaranda—flowering tree

jefe politico—governor

jícara—carved gourd for drinking chocolate

juzgado—courthouse

ladino—person of Spanish-Indian blood

lamina—tin roofing

¡Lastima!—Alas!

lavandera—washerwoman

libretto—the record kept by a *mozo* of the number of tasks he performs

loro—parrot

macaco—an irregular silver coin stamped with the arms of Spain

machete—swordlike tool

macho—mule

maíz—corn (pronounced mah-ees, nearly like mice)

Mames—one of principal Indian tribes

mañana—this morning, tomorrow, any time

mancha—flight of locusts

mantilla—lace shawl

marimba—national musical instrument

masa—corn batter

- masacuate—Guatemalan boa constrictor  
 matasamoras—a fungus growth attacking the flesh between the toes  
 matilisquate—white mahogany  
 mayordomo—supervisor on a *finca*  
 mecapal—tumpline by which Indian carries his burden  
 metate—stone mortar for grinding corn  
 mexcate—Indian shoulder bag  
 milpa—Indian's corn patch  
 Monja Blanca—white orchid, Guatemala national flower  
 mozo—Indian laborer  
 muñeca—doll
- nahual—soul's counterpart in the animal world  
 nigua—small burrowing flea  
 novio—sweetheart
- oja de sal—broad-leaved plant used for wrapping  
 olla—clay jug; *aguardiente* distilled in an olla  
 orejas—trouser flaps on Indian costume
- paches—potato-meal tamales made in Quezaltenango  
 pajarito—small bird  
 pajón—tough grass used for thatch; roots used for brooms  
 pan dulce—sweetened bread  
 panela—sugar cane  
 parranda—spree  
 patio—enclosed court with garden  
 patojo—brat  
 patrón—boss  
 petate—rush or tule sleeping mat  
 pie-de-gallo—red native air plant  
 piedra de moler—corn grinding stone (see metate)  
 pila—fountain  
 piojo—head louse  
 pisto—small change  
 pita—maguey fiber  
 pito—whistle  
 pito-real—native songbird

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pizote—coatimundi

plátano—banana-like fruit edible only when cooked

plátano en mole—*plátano* cooked with chili sauce

plaza—public square; market

plazuela—little plaza

poco a poco—little by little

pok—waterfowl of the grebe family, found only on Lake Atitlán

¡Pollon!—(literally, big chicken) Fine!

pom—incense

Popul Vuh—sacred book of the Quichés

posole—hot gruel made of corn batter

potrero—pasture land

poyo—primitive Indian stove

presbitero—parish priest

punte hamaca—hammock bridge

puro—cigar

quemadera—pagan altar

quetzal—Guatemala bird of paradise and symbol of liberty;  
also monetary unit, on par with dollar

Quiché—principal Guatemalan Indian tribe

quitagoma—remedy for hangover

ranchito—thatched shelter

rancho—Indian hut

randa—embroidered seam covering

reboso—Indian scarf

refajo—skirt

risco—craggy pinnacle of earth and rock carved by erosion from  
a cliff

rodillera—woolen apron worn by Indian men of certain villages

ronpopo—egg and brandy drink

sábana—shawl

sabroso—delicious

sala—main room of a house

salpicón—salmagundi

¡Salud!—Your health!

¡Saludes!—Greetings!

sarro—a cocina-like deposit found in a certain river bed

servilleta—carrying cloth

Sombrerón—elf with large hat

Son, El—native dance tune

sopilote—black vulture (sometimes spelled zopilote)

suyucal—palm-leaf rain cape

taquasin—opossum

temporal—heavy rain

tienda—shop

tinaja—water jar

tocoyal—Indian woman's head decoration

tortilla—round flat corncake

tortón—large *tortilla*

tostada—small toasted *tortilla*

totoposte—hardtack made of corn meal

trasbordo—change of trains

Tzijolá—mounted sun god

tzut—Indian head cloth

Tzutujil—coastal Indian tribe

vamonos pues—let's go

¡Vaya!—O.K.

velorio—funeral wake

virginita—little virgin

Xelajú—Indian name for Quezaltenango

¡Ya!—Enough!

zaguán—courtway

zarabanda—Indian dance

zompopo—large leaf-cutting ant



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